

# ***POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY***

*The chief purpose of education is to teach young people to find pleasure in the right things. – Plato*

*Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact. – William James*

*There is but one solution to the intricate riddle of life: to improve ourselves and contribute to the happiness of others. – Mary Shelley*

*Our greatest power comes not from the positions we occupy or the titles we hold; our greatest power comes from the character we choose to reveal and the purpose we choose to serve. So choose courage, choose humility, choose empathy. – Carly Fiorina*

## **Official Catalog Description**

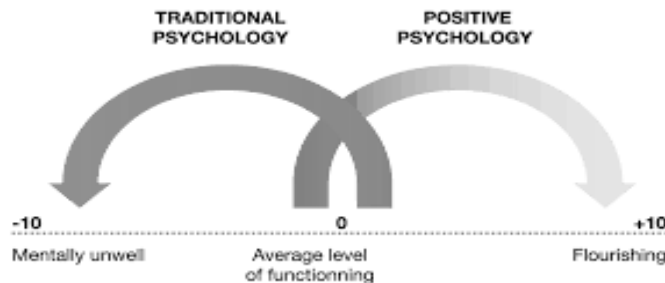
(Prerequisites: PSYC 110; a grade of C or higher in PSYC 225)

Provides an introduction to positive psychology, the scientific study of how individuals thrive and communities flourish. This course focuses on explaining, predicting, and improving subjective well-being. As part of the course, students will participate in experiential activities designed to enhance their strengths, virtues, positivity, and resilience.

## **Unofficial Course Narrative**

Psychology has been long preoccupied with human limitations and mental disorders. We have historically focused on what's wrong with people and "patched" them up. Only relatively recently has psychology self-corrected to guide people in growing and functioning better. There has been a decisive switch from only studying the negative to embracing the positive as well. We can do more than survive; we can learn to thrive as individuals and flourish as communities.

Welcome to the science and application of positive psychology, where we shall explore people living their best lives. Each week, you will explore the core concepts, examine the research behind those concepts, and engage in evidence-based experiential activities that enhance well-being. In other words, you will learn a lot of positive psychology and apply it to yourself and your community.



## **Required Texts**

Compton, W. C., & Hoffman, E. (2024). *Positive psychology: The science of happiness and flourishing* (4th ed.). Sage. ISBN 978-1071931073 (designated as **C** on course calendar)

Ehrenreich, B. (2009). *Bright-sided: How positive thinking is undermining America*. Picador. ISBN 978-0-312-65885-4 (designated as **E** on course calendar)

## Faculty Information

Professor: John C. Norcross, Ph.D., ABPP, Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
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Office hours: Mon, Tue, and Thu 10:00 – 11:00, and by appointment  
Office location: 224 Alumni Memorial Hall

## Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

Students successfully completing the course will demonstrate:

1. understanding of the core concepts, theories, and controversies in positive psychology (as assessed by performance on weekly quizzes, class participation, and a final examination)
2. knowledge and evaluation of the principal research methodologies and findings of positive psychology (as assessed by performance on weekly quizzes, brief papers, and a final examination)
3. application of evidence-based assessments and interventions of positive psychology to their own lives (as assessed by their completion of experiential activities and preparation of brief papers)

## Noshing with Norcross

In an effort to get to know more students in the course, I will each week randomly draw names of students in this course to enjoy bagels/sandwiches with me on campus. My treat. We can discuss anything you like; there is no set agenda.

## Evaluation Process

Grades in this course will be determined by your performance on weekly quizzes, brief papers, generating multiple-choice items, co-facilitating a class with the professor, and a final examination. In cases of “borderline” grades, your class participation will also be considered.

There will be 13 weekly quizzes (13 points apiece) and one final examination (25 points). These are opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge and apply your understanding. The weekly multiple-choice quizzes will usually be given at the beginning of Tuesday’s class; these quizzes will cover reading assignments, lecture material, and class discussions. Make-up quizzes are not available; missed quizzes become dropped quizzes. The final exam will primarily assess your knowledge of material covered in the last two weeks of class and secondarily assess your mastery of themes throughout the course.

Six brief papers, accorded 10 points apiece, are requested. These papers summarize your chosen experiential activities, which will apply positive psychology assessments and interventions to you and the community. Detailed instructions for completing the experiential activities and for preparing the papers are attached. You have multiple options for these experiential assignments; choose those that most interest and benefit you. All students will complete paper 12 OR paper 13 (not both).

Finally, you will construct multiple-choice items for a quiz and co-facilitate one class with the professor. Detailed instructions for these activities are also provided on this syllabus. Putting it all together:

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| Best 10 of 13 quizzes (13 points each) | 130 (≈ 52% of grade)       |
| Final examination                      | 25 (≈ 10% of grade)        |
| Multiple-choice & co-facilitation      | 30 (≈ 12% of grade)        |
| Best 6 brief papers (10 points each)   | <u>60</u> (≈ 25% of grade) |
| Total                                  | 250 possible points        |

In calculating final course grades, we employ the conventional 90%+ for the A range, 80%+ for the B range, 70%+ for C range, and 60%+ for the D range.

### **Course Policies**

This is our class. Please be interested, honest, curious, responsible, and active. Here are behaviors that do *not* help us “build and broaden”: cell phones ringing, students arriving late, off-task talking during class, and papers arriving after the deadline. Let’s manifest the tenets of positive psychology during our class time.

Regular class attendance is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Attendance will not be taken formally but you are expected to come to class and participate. You are responsible for all announcements made in class. If absent from a class, you are responsible for the material covered.

Please refer to the University’s *Academic Code of Honesty*. Plagiarism, dishonest quiz/exam behavior, and collaboration on individual papers will result in a grade of F for the course. Submitting false data or manufacturing data on the brief papers will also result in a grade of F for the course. As stated in the *Student Handbook*: Failures in the area of academic honesty strike at the heart of what is essential to the University community – the pursuit of truth.

You are encouraged to participate fully and civilly in class. At the same time, we will not tolerate disruptive or offensive behavior antithetical to our university ideals or contrary to a conducive learning environment. Civility is a fragile construct that each of us must cherish and protect.

Kindly do not use laptops during class time. Please turn off your cell phone while in class. You may not text, tweet, or venture online during class. Violation of this policy will demand punishment – though one that does not infringe on your eighth amendment rights.

Our class time will involve lectures, discussions, activities, videotapes, and demonstrations. The primary function of the lectures is to supplement, not to repeat, the textbooks. The lectures will, therefore, contain information not found in the readings, and you will be tested on this material. You are free to decline participation in any discussions or activities.

Please familiarize yourself with applicable University of Scranton policies. Here are helpful links.

Academic Honesty: [www.scranton.edu/academics/wml/acad-integ/index.shtml](http://www.scranton.edu/academics/wml/acad-integ/index.shtml)

Students with Disabilities: [www.scranton.edu/disabilities](http://www.scranton.edu/disabilities)

Responsible Employee Reporting: [www.scranton.edu/equity-diversity/report-support.shtml](http://www.scranton.edu/equity-diversity/report-support.shtml)

Sexual Harassment & Sexual Misconduct: [www.scranton.edu/CARE](http://www.scranton.edu/CARE)

Faculty Reporting Obligations: [www.scranton.edu/equity-diversity/faculty-resources.shtml](http://www.scranton.edu/equity-diversity/faculty-resources.shtml)

The Writing Center helps students become better writers. Consultants work one-on-one to discuss your written work and provide feedback. To meet with a writing consultant, stop by during the Writing Center’s regular hours of operation, call 570-941-6147 to schedule an appointment, or complete the Writing Assistance Request Form online.

The syllabus is subject to revision. Any revisions will be announced in class. You may also receive announcements through Brightspace, so please regularly check your University e-mail account.

## AI Policy

I applaud the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI), such as GPT, ChatGPT, and DALL-E, for the expansion and distribution of global knowledge. Feel free to access and use AI to learn more about Positive Psychology and its application and research. It is each student's responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any AI output; you bear the final responsibility.

At the same time, you are NOT allowed to use AI or machine learning tools to conduct or write the written assignments in this course. Writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course; hence, all writing assignments should be prepared by you alone. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct.

Of course, different classes at Scranton will implement different AI policies. It is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

## Final Word of (Alleged) Wisdom

Although we will be studying happy topics and positivity, please do not conflate our course content with an easy grade of A or a low workload. This is a challenging, 300-level course with a corresponding workload. The topics will probably prove fascinating to you and thus the assignments less than the typical chore. Nonetheless, please expect a rigorous college course that will demand regular class participation, weekly quizzes, and frequent assignments.



*Life will break you. Nobody can protect you from that, and living alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning. You have to love. You have to feel. It is the reason you are here on earth. You are here to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself you tasted as many as you could. — Louise Erdrich*

## Course Calendar and Assignments

| <i>Week</i>                         | <i>Date</i>      | <i>Topic</i>   | <i>Reading</i>    | <i>Quiz#</i> | <i>Paper #</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--|-------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1                                   | Jan 25           | Welcome; Intro to Positive Psychology                    | Syllabus          |              |                |
| 2                                   | Jan 30<br>Feb 1  | Definitions & Foundations                                | C1, Effectiveness | 1            | 1              |
| 3                                   | Feb 6<br>Feb 8   | Emotion & Motivation                                     | C2                | 2            | 2              |
| 4                                   | Feb 13<br>Feb 15 | Subjective Well-Being (SWB)                              | C3                | 3            | 3              |
| 5                                   | Feb 20<br>Feb 22 | Flow, Mindfulness, Peak Performance                      | C4                | 4            | 4              |
| 6                                   | Feb 27<br>Feb 29 | Romantic Love & Positive Families                        | C5                | 5            | 5              |
| 7                                   | Mar 5<br>Mar 7   | Positive Health  | C6                | 6            | 6              |
| Mar 12 & 14: Spring Break; no class |                  |  |                   |              |                |
| 8                                   | Mar 19<br>Mar 21 | Excellence, Aesthetics, & Creativity                     | C7                | 7            | 7              |
| 9                                   | Mar 26<br>Mar 28 | Well-Being Across the Lifespan<br>Easter Break; no class | C8                | 8            | 8              |
| 10                                  | Apr 2<br>Apr 4   | Optimal Well-Being                                       | C9                | 9            | 9              |
| 11                                  | Apr 9<br>Apr 11  | Religion, Spirituality, & Well-Being                     | C10               | 10           | 10             |
| 12                                  | Apr 16<br>Apr 18 | Positive Institutions & Cultural Well-Being              | C11               | 11           | 11             |
| 13                                  | Apr 23<br>Apr 25 | Limits & Failures of Positivity                          | EIntro, 1, 6, 8   | 12           | make-up        |
| 14                                  | Apr 30<br>May 2  | Future of Positive Psychology                            | C12               | 13           | 12 or 13       |
| 15                                  | May 7<br>May 9   | Reflections, Closures, Kahoots Extravaganza              |                   |              | Final Exam     |

## GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS

Kindly type all papers double-spaced with conventional fonts and one-inch margins. The target word count for most papers is between 300 and 400 words. Please record your word count at the end of each paper and place your name on the *back* of the last page (which enables blind/masked grading). Avoid cover sheets and extra blank pages (save trees!). You are encouraged (but not required) to print your paper on both sides.

You have choices on which 6 brief assignments/papers to complete. You may complete more than 6; I will count the 6 highest grades. Please do **not** recomplete any positive psychology interventions that you have completed previously; prioritize new experiences.

Papers are due at the beginning of the designated class period. *We do not accept late papers*; please assume responsibility (a positive trait) and hand in your papers on time.

Collaboration and consultation with other students are **not** permitted in preparing these papers. You may consult with the Writing Center and the professor, but otherwise the papers must represent your original, independent work.

### Checklist for All Papers

For the sake of my sanity and your grade, please complete the following checklist before submitting your papers.

- ✓ My paper is typed double-spaced (except for Gratitude Letters) with a conventional font
- ✓ Uses one-inch margins throughout
- ✓ The word count is between 300 and 400 (unless otherwise noted)
- ✓ My name is written on the *back* of the last page
- ✓ Paper is titled, e.g., Paper 1: Character Strengths
- ✓ I did not place the professor's name, date, or class title on the paper; rest assured that the professor knows that information
- ✓ My paper contains few or no junk adjectives, e.g., "really," "very," "truly," "actually"
- ✓ The number of contractions is limited, as these are formal writing assignments
- ✓ Vacuous words, such as "issues," have been eliminated
- ✓ Extremist characterizations of "always" and "never" do not appear in my writing
- ✓ Requested documents are attached to the paper
- ✓ The paper does not contain title pages or blank last pages
- ✓ Redundancy is anathema: these are focused, short papers
- ✓ Each question is addressed in my paper and receives its own brief paragraph
- ✓ My paper is beautifully assembled and stapled diagonally in the upper left corner
- ✓ The paper represents my original, independent work
- ✓ "I have written concisely and directly in the first-person singular"
- ✓ "I am pleased and proud to submit this fine piece of work!"

### Multiple-Choice Items and Class Co-facilitation

Each student will contribute to this course and fellow students by preparing 6 multiple-choice items for a quiz and by co-facilitating one Thursday class meeting with the professor. The latter will require you to prepare discussion questions.

You will be assigned one chapter from the course textbook and will write 6 multiple-choice questions for the Tuesday quiz. Expect to devote two or three hours to the task. Three of those questions can be definitional or knowledge questions; the other three questions should ask students to apply the material in the chapter (application or active-learning questions), as opposed to regurgitating memorized material. Select core principles in the chapters and then construct the quiz questions as applications of that knowledge. At the top of each item, indicate the page number for that item. Construct four response options for each item, bolding or asterisking the correct option.

Herewith are several guidelines for writing multiple-choice items for the quiz:

- ◆ Ensure each question/item covers meaningful content.
- ◆ Avoid “complex” multiple-choice items, which present a number of conditions in the item stem (e.g., a & b, but not c).
- ◆ Make the items appear neat and easy to follow.
- ◆ Use novel material to test higher-level learning; paraphrase textbook language in a quiz item to avoid testing for simple recall.
- ◆ Feature the central idea in the stem instead of in the response choices.
- ◆ Word the stem positively; avoid negatives such as NOT or EXCEPT. If negative words are used, use the word cautiously and place the word in capitals and boldface.
- ◆ Avoid giving clues to the correct answer, such as always, never, completely, and grammatical inconsistencies that cue the test-taker to the correct choice; or absurd options.
- ◆ Vary the location of the right answer (e.g., not mostly c as correct answer).
- ◆ Avoid all-of-the-above and none-of-the-above.
- ◆ Make all distractors/incorrect responses plausible.
- ◆ Keep things simple, concentrating on what you want to assess.

Kindly email your six questions in a single Word document to [norcross@scranton.edu](mailto:norcross@scranton.edu) by Sunday night before the quiz. The grading criteria for the questions include: Contributed 6 typed multiple-choice questions; three of those questions required thoughtful application of material; questions were clear and coherent; questions assessed important content from the text; and questions emailed to professor in a timely manner. Congratulate yourself for assisting students in recalling and, most importantly, applying the valuable knowledge they acquired this seminar.

For co-facilitating a class, read the assignment and prepare at least 6 typed discussion or activity questions. At least three of the questions should be application or active-learning questions.

Ψ Your professor will arrive in the seminar room a few minutes before class to review and refine your discussion questions. Bring two printed copies of your discussion questions.

Ψ The professor will begin the class with announcements and an introduction, and he will end the class as well. In between, you are primarily responsible for facilitating the class discussion.

Ψ You typically have time to ask four discussion questions. Please plan accordingly.

Ψ Begin your cofacilitation with what Seligman and Peterson call a *Serious Introduction*: Tell a story about an event in your life that shows you at your best. We are not interested in achievements or performances but rather in strengths of character. Ground the story in a truthful signature strength. This should be an experience when you lived up to your highest potential and/or best self. Describe when it happened, what led to that point in your life, how it made you feel then, how it makes you feel now, how it reflects who you are as a person. This should be about 2 minutes long.

Ψ Your subsequent task is to facilitate discussion, not to lecture. Accordingly, engage your peers in addressing the discussion questions, as opposed to answering the questions yourself. When facilitating, hold back on your own thoughts and privilege those of your fellow students.

Ψ When posing a question, provide a context and introduction for it. Instead of simply asking the question, give a sentence or two explaining it or placing it in the context of the readings. If you request that we engage in a short activity, then please provide some context or rationale for it.

Ψ Many of the interesting points in the reading will generate multiple questions. However, when posing questions in class, please ask one at a time.

Ψ We seek informed discussion and respectful debate among psychology majors. If your peers respond with a simple “I agree” or “I don’t see it that way,” gently prompt and encourage them to elaborate on their responses. For two examples, “What makes you say so?” “Could you elaborate on your reasons?”

Ψ Try to involve *all* students in the class discussions; draw out contributions. Do not let a single student dominate. Instead, call on different students; ask quiet students for their opinions; and go around the classroom once or twice, asking everyone for a focused response.

Ψ Thought-provoking questions require time to answer. Pause before expecting or requesting responses; humans need time to formulate answers to questions of any complexity. Offer encouragement, maintain eye contact, and let the question stand for 10 seconds.

Ψ Reward and praise students for contributing. A simple “thank you” typically suffices. The reward is contingent on a genuine effort to contribute, not on providing a “correct” or super answer.

Ψ Concern yourself not with getting through your entire list of questions. Focus instead on facilitating a lively, quality discussion.

Ψ The grading criteria for evaluating the co-facilitation follow: Produced 6 discussion/activity questions for class; generated interesting and stimulating questions; mastered the material under discussion; engaged all student in the discussion; and co-facilitation was well-planned and organized.

Ψ Spend a few minutes with your professor immediately after class to discuss the co-facilitation experience, rate your performance on these criteria, and receive written feedback on your performance.

### **Paper 1: VIA Survey of Character Strengths**

Signature strengths are cross-situational positive traits integral to a person’s identity and are used frequently. Read pages 36 to 38 of the textbook before completing this activity. Multiple studies link use of signature strengths with improved well-being and happiness for as long as 6 months.

Kindly visit [www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu) to take the VIA Survey of Character Strengths. It requires a login, but registration is free. The survey is 240 questions, so be prepared and hang in there. Upon completion, the survey will provide a hierarchy of your personal strengths.

For the paper, begin by reporting your top 5 strengths. The rest of the paper will reflect on them. Which, if any, on the list surprised you? Which did not surprise you? Do you believe the measure was valid (actually measuring what it purports to measure)? Focus on how each strength manifests in your life and how each strength contributes to your happiness. Finally, you may find yourself agreeing with the listed strengths yet disagreeing with the order. Rearrange the hierarchy to mirror the importance you place on each one.

### **Paper 2: Pleasure vs. Philanthropy**

Every day, we have the opportunity to improve both our own lives and the lives of others. Although they are not mutually exclusive, pleasure and philanthropy do have distinct implications for positive psychology. Please read pages 52 (Hedonic Perspectives) and 205 (Altruism) in the textbook before completing this exercise.



You will plan and carry out two activities. The first activity will be a pleasurable one. Think of something fun, enjoyable, and legal that would make you happy. Kindly avoid activities you would naturally encounter in your routine; plan something out of the ordinary. The second activity will be one of philanthropy. Do something you know will improve someone else's well-being. It could be anything from using your signature strengths for others, to volunteering some time to help someone in need. After you complete both activities, take some time to reflect on them.

Then write a paper exploring the similarities and differences between the two. Describe your pleasurable and philanthropic activities. Summarize your feelings during and after each of the activities. How were they similar and how did they differ?

### **Paper 3: Two Signature Strengths**

Signature strengths are cross-situational positive traits integral to a person's identity and are used frequently. Read pages 34 to 38 of the textbook to learn more about them. Multiple studies link use of signature strengths with improved well-being and happiness for as long as 6 months.

If you have not already completed the VIA, then go to [www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu) to take it for free. Once you have your results, select your top 2 signature strengths. For the next week or so, find new ways to use your signature strengths. Be creative, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone.

Reflect on how, if at all, your happiness and well-being have changed. What were your signature strengths? Have you noticed any differences in your happiness? Do you attribute these differences to using your signature strengths? If there was no difference, why do you think that is? Please compile your experiences and thoughts about the activity in this paper.

### **Paper 4: Create a Flow Experience**

Flow experiences, also known colloquially as *being in the zone*, is the mental state of a person performing an activity fully immersed, involved, and joyful. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss in one's sense of space, time, and self. For more information on flow experiences, please read pages 121 to 123 in your textbook.

For this two-part assignment, first analyze a previous flow experience. In your description, please consider what led to the experience, what potentially impeded the experience, and what you did to circumnavigate these impediments. Second, set yourself up for a flow experience. Describe what you did to set the stage for the experience, say whether or not it happened, and reflect on the situation as a whole. If you had a flow experience, talk about the emotions and thoughts associated with it. If you did not, generate ideas about what may have prevented the experience.

### **Paper 5: Peak Experience**

Think of the most wonderful experiences of your life: the happiest, ecstatic moments (Polson, 1985). Those are your peak experiences.

Begin this exercise by reviewing pages 144 to 147 of the textbook on peak experiences. For your paper, describe a peak experience as vividly and accurately as possible. Summarize where you were at the time of the peak experience, what you were doing, and how you felt during and after the experience. Finally, explain what the peak experience meant to you then and now.

### **Paper 6: Three Good Things for Which You're Grateful**

The research is overwhelming that people who count their blessings regularly are happier and more content with life. This consistent relation between happiness and gratitude is explored on page 97 of your textbook, and we highly recommend that you read it.

For 7 nights in a row, set aside a few minutes before you go to bed to identify 3 things that went well or made you happy that day. These events do not have to be earthshattering; they can be of little or great importance. Once you have them in mind, think about why this good thing happened. This is not a question of why they made you happy; be sure to focus on why the thing happened.

At the end of the seven days, write a paper about your experience. Give examples from your week about the good things, but do not provide all of them. Rather, reflect on the entire experience and whether your focus on gratitude affected your happiness over the course of the week. Estimate how much (percentage) this exercise increased your amount of gratitude.

### **Paper 7: Savoring**

Savoring is becoming aware that you are having “the time of your life” in the moment, wishing it could go on forever, and trying to elongate and intensify your positive feelings. Pages 142 to 143 of your textbook elaborate on the topic.

This assignment entails planning a moment to savor. Please start by selecting something that you believe is worth savoring. Next, please set aside time for the savoring. This activity should be outside your normal routine, and you should not have to cut the moment short for any reason. Be sure to plan and go to the experience with everything you will need to enjoy it. For example, you should bring enough money if you are going to a movie, and you should bring comfortable shoes and plenty of water if you are going on a hike.

When the day and time arrive, enjoy the moment and try to savor it. Your book lists several savoring strategies to aid you in this; please familiarize yourself with them and attempt them until you find one that works. If you have trouble savoring, do not criticize or force yourself. Some people have a more difficult time savoring than others.

After the experience, document as much as you can about it. You may find yourself savoring even more intensely after the experience is over, so I encourage you to share your experiences with others.

When all of this is finished, write your paper. Kindly include what you did, the savoring strategies you attempted, your subjective experience, and any insights from the experience. If you found savoring natural and easy, describe what about the experience made it so. If you had difficulty savoring, describe what may have disrupted the experience for you.

### **Paper 8: Seeking Glimmers**

Glimmer, a term popularized by psychologist Dr. Justine Grosso, is an internal or external cue that elicits feelings of comfort or joy. Some common glimmers are a beautiful sunset, a warm blanket, the ideal cup of coffee or tea, the smell of your favorite candle, a loving interaction, and the perfect autumn day.

Glimmers are the opposite of triggers, which activate the flight-or-flight response in the body. A glimmer, by contrast, activates the rest-and-digest response, encouraging homeostasis in the body and a state of relaxation. Triggers can be avoided, and more glimmers can be sought to increase our joy and safety.

This assignment entails two steps. First, identify your glimmers over a 7-day period. Keep an informal written list of them, perhaps on your cell phone. You are probably aware of several already. Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful place; recall what made you feel comforted and loved as a child; think of your love for family and friends; keep open for them each day. Second, write a brief paper addressing the following questions: How many glimmers did you experience over the week-long period? What were they? Any recurring categories of glimmers? How did you identify your glimmers? Did you already have an idea of your glimmers? Did you follow the aforementioned ideas on how to identify your glimmers? Did your glimmers help you achieve a state of comfort or joy? What is their probable mechanism of action (by which processes do they elicit feelings of comfort or joy)? What is one way you would improve this assignment?

### **Paper 9: Social Media Cleanse**

Most social media use represents passive and unproductive leisure that rarely contributes to personal or cultural improvement. For this assignment, you will avoid all social media (e.g., television, internet, online platforms) not school or work-related for an entire week. Temporarily turn off notifications. Please explain the detox in advance to family and friends so that they do not worry about your safety or welfare. The assignment lets you press pause on social media platforms. It may also boost your mood and self-image, according to the research. For the paper, summarize your experiences, results, and slips. Did you experience any boost in mood or self-image? What are the lasting lessons of your social media cleanse?

### **Paper 10: Posttraumatic Growth**

In the face of trauma, a person can adapt in ways that launches them into a better sense of well-being. This is done through renegotiating personal goals and life priorities in meaningful ways. This change in perspective is known as posttraumatic growth.

For this assignment, please write about a time of significant adversity or loss. I/the professor will be reading these papers, so choose a story you feel comfortable sharing with me. Begin by talking about the initial hardships that came as a result of this adversity or loss. Think about what you lost and what changes were initially made for the worse. Then, reflect on the positive changes that you underwent as time went on. Start this reflection internally, focusing on any changes in priority, thinking, goals, or life outlook. Follow that with how those changes poured into your life. Some good examples of external changes include, but are not limited to, relationships, routine, and health.

### **Paper 11: Gratitude Letter** (only for students who have not previously written one)

A gratitude letter is a popular, research-supported method of positive psychology. This method entails writing letters of gratitude to people who have been especially kind to you but who have never been properly thanked. Research indicates that a gratitude letter or visit can temporarily increase your happiness.

For this assignment, read pages 362 to 364 in the textbook. Then identify a living individual who has been especially kind to you but who has never been properly thanked. This person should not be psychology professors, college roommates, fellow students, or romantic interests.

Word process (single-space) a gratitude letter of at least 700 words. Format the assignment as a letter with the date, your return address, the recipient's address, salutation, body, closing, and your name/signature.

The letter should describe your grateful feelings and the reasons for your gratitude. Begin the letters with the reasons you are expressing gratitude now (e.g., In our Positive Psychology course, we are studying gratitude letter). Provide specific examples of the person's assistance or contribution to you. Discuss the consequences of the person's kindness on your functioning and future. Detail your gratitude; avoid general and diffuse praise in favor of the specific and concrete. Please do *not* include general news about your life, your job, or your hot friends; the gratitude letter is exclusively about thanking somebody for their kindness. Sign your name to the letter.

Provide me with a draft of the letter, deleting (if you like) the name of the recipients and any overly personal details. I will treat the content of the letters as confidential and will return it to you (for mailing) once reviewed and edited.

After revising the letter based on my feedback, put it in the mail. Mail the letter to the intended recipient; that is part of the assignment and part of the beneficial effect of the gratitude letter. By selecting this writing assignment, you are ethically committing to mailing the letters.

### **Paper 12: Positive Psychology Critique**

For all the strengths of positive psychology, it does not come without its criticism. There is no shortage in the literature of articles highlighting the weaknesses and limitations of positive psychology. We hope that at this point in your psychology career, you can critique with nuance, appreciating the contributions of positive psychology while recognizing its imperfections.

Please secure 2 peer-reviewed journal articles that critique positive psychology. Briefly summarize the articles' main points. Decide how valid and supported by research each criticism is. Then, take your own stance and support it with specific examples from the articles, class material, and the textbooks. We request originality in your viewpoint; kindly avoid regurgitating what the articles said or what you learned in class. Word count for this paper is 500 to 800.

### **Paper 13: Meta Reflection**

Over the course of the semester, you have delved into what positive psychology has to offer. You undoubtedly were aware of some concepts presented in this class, but you should have many takeaways from this semester. To celebrate that, please reflect on how your well-being have changed, if at all, this semester. Reflect on what changes occurred or did not occur. Explore if your engagement with positive psychology activities in this course impacted your well-being. If there were factors outside the class that impacted your well-being, then please share those as well. Describe any self-knowledge and social awareness you have received from this course. Then offer well-reasoned hypotheses for why those changes occurred.

The multiple experiential exercises throughout the semester targeted specific facets of positive psychology. For this final paper, please integrate the results of those out-of-class activities, in-class demonstrations, and other aspects. Include specific examples as well as general statements. Word count for this paper is 500 to 800.