

Course Title:	Positive Psychology
Grade Level(s):	9 - 12
Length of Course:	One semester or equivalent term
Credit:	5 units
Prerequisite:	none
Co-requisite:	none

**Course Overview:**

This is an introductory course to the field of *Positive Psychology*. *Positive Psychology* is the scientific study of human happiness, well-being, and strength of character. The following topics will be covered: defining and measuring happiness; interpreting beliefs; developing healthy self-esteem; mindfulness, focus, and appreciation; learned optimism; intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation; resilience and post-traumatic growth; perfectionism; creativity; setting goals and forming positive habits; and social support structures and healthy relationships. Students will engage in detailed analysis of these concepts and gain an understanding of the research behind them.

Schools Offering:	Del Valle High School Granada High School Livermore High School Vineyard High School
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Meets University of California Entrance Requirements:	Seeking “g” – elective approval
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Board Approval:	<i>Pending Board Approval</i>
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Course Materials:	A Primer in Positive Psychology; Peterson, Christopher; Oxford University Press, 2006 ISBN: 0-19- 518833-0
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Supplemental Materials:	Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment; Ben-Shahar, Tal; McGraw-Hill Education, 2007 ISBN-10: 0071492399  The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life; Acho, Shawn; ISBN-10: 0307591557
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Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within;  
Goldberg, Natalie  
Shambhala Publishing, 2016  
ISBN-10: 161180308X

Minding the body, Mending the Mind;  
Borysenko, Joan  
Da Capo Press, 2007  
ISBN-10: 0738211168

Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and  
Your Life;  
Seligman, Martin  
Vintage Publishing, 2006  
ISBN-10: 1400078393

The Pursuit of Happiness: Who is Happy and Why?;  
Myers, David  
Aquarian Press, 1993  
ISBN-10: 1855382733

The Optimistic Child: Proven Program to Safeguard  
Children from Depression & Build Lifelong  
Resilience;  
Seligman, Martin  
Mariner Books, 2007  
ISBN-10: 0618918094

Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of  
Happiness and Well being;  
Seligman, Martin  
Atria Books, 2012  
ISBN-10: 9781439190760

Stumbling on Happiness;  
Gilbert, Daniel  
Atria Books, 2012  
ISBN-10: 9781439190760

Health and Optimism;  
Christopher Peterson;  
Bossio, Lisa M.  
Free Press, 1991  
ISBN-10: 9780029249819

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

### COURSE CONTENT:

#### **Unit 1: Introduction to Positive Psychology and Distinction between Behavioral, Psychodynamic, and Humanistic Psychology**

The goal of this unit is to introduce students to the major themes of *Positive Psychology* and to explain why this discipline came to be, why it is important, and what it addresses that the rest of psychology does not. Students will be exposed to, and be able to compare and contrast, the major strands of psychology, including Behaviorism, Psychodynamic Psychology, and Humanistic Psychology, the strand that *Positive Psychology* was born from. They will learn that the aim of *Positive Psychology* is not simply to treat mental illness, but to enable individuals and communities to thrive. Students will also begin to understand the expectation that beyond comprehending new material, they are to internalize this material through in-class and at-home exercises so they can experience a positive transformation in their personal life.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

**Good Things Jar Every Day:** Students will write down the good things that happen every day, and put them in a jar. They will open the jar at end of the semester. Students will engage in the practice of cultivating gratitude through this assignment. Students will write a one-page journal reflection after opening the jar. The reflection will include connections to content of the course as a whole and will require students to show their depth of understanding and development of knowledge over the semester by incorporating key terminology and core ideas.

**Four Problem Areas Assignment:** Students will choose four areas or issues in their life that they want to focus on throughout the course. These will give students a concrete focus for applying the generalities from the readings and class discussions. Areas might relate to academic, social life, family, job, leisure-time, money, physical health, or more vague areas of concern such as anxiety or stress. Students will produce a thorough statement for each area of at least a 1.5 to 3 pages in length.

#### **Unit 2: Happiness - Defining, Measuring, Determinants. The 4 quadrants: Advantages, Pleasure versus Meaning. Happiness in Education, Happiness in the Workplace**

Students will begin to explore their definition of happiness. What is it? When have they experienced it? How would they define it? They will be introduced to the findings of psychological research about happiness as the experience of pleasure and meaning in life, as opposed to only pleasure or only meaning. The class will discuss common myths about happiness and happy people (ex: that happy people do not experience “ups” and “downs”), and students will explore how societal pressures can potentially lead people to hedonism, nihilism, or a “rat race” mentality. Students will explore the flaws with these approaches to life. The role of internal versus external forces in determining happiness will be examined, as will the error of studying averages of trends and disregarding the positive outliers in psychology to find and nurture genius/talent and to make normal life more fulfilling.

Research will be explored as a precursor to explaining the benefit from studying happy and successful people. The advantages of happiness in school and in the workplace will be explored through the link between happiness, success, and creativity. Finally, the concept of happiness as the ultimate end will be analyzed and discussed.

*Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Life Satisfaction Scale and Orientation to Happiness Scale: These two scales are different ways of measuring overall happiness and life satisfaction. Both are valid and reliable instruments for assessing happiness. Students will conduct a survey using these scales and analyze the data. Based on the survey results, they will write a 1-page reflective analysis of their data that will require them to not only connect the content of the unit to their own lives, but also to the larger research base. Questions to be considered within the analysis include: why their data may or may not be similar to that of the research discussed in class and broader issues of ecological validity of this type of data collection.

**Unit 3: Beliefs, Interpretation, Self-Image / Self-Esteem / Self-Love**

Students will be introduced to research that shows the power of external pressures on one's interpretation of the self and will learn about how beliefs shape one's reality. Through numerous exercises, involving visualization, rational thinking, and journaling, students will learn to optimize their optimism. Dr. Carol Dweck's research in growth versus fixed mindset will be introduced, as well as research on constrained versus unconstrained vision. Toward the end of the unit, there will be an emphasis on students engaging in activities that promote unconditional self-acceptance.

*Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

VIA Character Strengths Survey: This free survey provides students with an assessment of their various character strengths. Students will take the survey and record the results. They will write down an experience that highlights each of their strengths of character from the VIA survey. Students will learn about what strengths they have and how they can use them. After the survey, students will write a 1-page response answering the following questions: Does it make sense to you that these are your top 5 character strengths? Was anything surprising to you? How could you use your top character strength to your advantage in your life? Think of a tangible way in which you can use your top character strength this week and describe it in your journal. What else did you learn from completing this assessment?

**Unit 4: Mindfulness, Focus, Appreciation, Perspective, Meditation**

This unit will begin with a survey of different definitions of focus and mindfulness so that students can begin to understand these concepts in various ways. The class will address the power of question in shifting our focus and therefore in creating our reality. What do we often ask ourselves and why? Are these questions that lead us to have a positive or negative self-image? Students will explore the roots of pessimism versus optimism through looking at the ways different people react to identical events. This will lead to a discussion of "alternative reality theory," and students will practice shifting their mindset and perspectives towards a more optimistic interpretation. Mindfulness activities as tools to increase focus, reduce anxiety, and increase productivity will be introduced at this stage and will be practiced regularly for the duration of the course.

*Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Mindfulness research has shown that regularly practicing mindfulness leads to a host of benefits. Therefore, students will be practicing mindfulness throughout the course. It will be part of their homework to practice 5+ minutes of mindfulness each day throughout the semester using a mindfulness website such as Calm. Each class session will begin with ~5 minutes of mindfulness. Product: Screenshot showing logged mindfulness practices will be submitted via google classroom on a weekly basis for credit.

**Unit 5: Learned Optimism, Character strengths, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Mindset, Change, and Neuroplasticity**

This unit will begin with a focus on Martin Seigman's research on learned helplessness and learned optimism so that students can understand the importance of mindset as a framework of reality and its influence on affect. The class will learn about the basics of the anatomy of the brain, neural pathways, and neuroplasticity. This will help students understand the benefits we get biologically and psychologically when we recognize what we are grateful for on a daily basis, and when we perform random acts of kindness towards others, among other things. The class will delve into research on gratitude, and students will be expected to maintain gratitude journals on a daily basis. The class will then delve into what leads to effective change in perception and behavior and what are common blocks to such change. Students will answer the question: What are effective ways to start positive habits and to maintain them in order to fortify pathways? The Affect, Behavior, Cognition (ABC) approach, will be explored in detail.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Using One's Strengths in Different Ways: Over the course of a week, students will strive to use their strengths of character in a novel way. They will reflect on the process, answering the following questions: Was it difficult to use these strengths in new ways? Was it valuable? Students will learn to grow their strengths and build new ones. Product: 2-page journal reflection in which students must demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts of the unit and how they were able to apply these concepts to their own lives. An expectation of linkage to neurobiology will be included in their reflection to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the role that the brain plays in the modification of behaviors.

Gratitude Letter: Students will write a gratitude letter and read it to the recipient by the due date of this assignment. The letter is to be at least one-page, double spaced. After students have finished writing their letter and have read it to the recipient, students will write another page about their experience and what the other person's experience was like. Students will answer the following questions: Was it difficult to do? Awkward? What feeling and emotions came up? Why? What emotions came up for the other person? What did you fear about the exercise? Were you excited by it?

#### **Unit 6: Flow, Creativity, Intrinsic Motivation, Curiosity, Novelty**

In this unit, students will learn about the importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and the importance of intrinsic motivation in experiencing Flow and in being fully creative. Students will be introduced to the concept of Flow and the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. They will learn about the role of focus, awareness, and self-control in Flow and the consequences as well as benefits from experiencing it. Students will learn about conditions that allow individuals to be most creative, such as comfort, time, collaboration, not comparing oneself to others, and accepting failure. They will engage in activities that shape their behavior to allow space for those conditions and begin to experience a better ability of divergent thinking, and ultimately creativity. The goal of this unit is to show students that if they focus on activities out of intrinsic motivation, rather than extrinsic, they are much more likely to experience Flow, creativity, and ultimately success and happiness.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Activities Journal: Students will maintain a daily journal of how they spend their day over the course of a week. Then, they will reflect on what activities they are glad to have pursued and those which they regret. They will make resolutions to spend more time on the positive activities (the intrinsically motivated ones). Product: 5-day journal log.

#### **Unit 7: Resilience and Post-traumatic growth**

The purpose of this unit is to provide students with the tools to learn how to “fall up.” Students will be introduced to Albert Ellis’s Cognitive Behavioral Model of Adversity Consequences - Beliefs and will apply it as a tool to deal with current setbacks in their own lives. The concept of the Imagined Counterfactual and the connection between thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives will be explored at length. Students will then be introduced to a survey of coping strategies under stress and learn how these strategies help people in all walks of life. The unit will end with an exploration of the discipline of Post-traumatic growth, focusing on trauma as a possible catalyst for enhanced personal strength, self-confidence, and heightened appreciation for social relationships.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

**Grit Scale:** Grit (passion + perseverance) is associated with both happiness and success, and is quite important particularly for high school and college. Duckworth’s survey will be administered, and then students will watch her Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) talk to understand the importance of resilience. They will look for opportunities to cultivate a mindset of persistence.

**Product:** Grit survey results will be used to create a personal action plan for student use. The focus will be on anticipating potential obstacles students may face in high school and how they can use the knowledge they gained to prepare to persist through it.

### **Unit 8: Positive Health, Physical Health**

In this unit, students will be introduced to the connection between physical and psychological health. Specifically, students will understand the benefits of exercise, mindfulness, sleep, and physical touch. The unit will begin by examining the biological and psychological benefits of exercise, such as the release of the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine, and how that affects one’s health and mood. Students will learn about research studies that show how effective consistent exercise can be at combating depression and will be introduced to research about effective ways to exercise and the importance of recovery.

Students will read research by Joan and Larry Borysenko about the mind/body connection and the unit will shift focus toward the benefits of mindfulness meditation on the prefrontal cortex and the immune system. In addition, students will learn about the effects of sleep (or lack thereof) on cognitive functioning, mood, and stress. Students will also learn about the importance of physical touch and the long-term effects of deprivation from physical touch. Finally, students will examine the connection between *Positive Psychology* exercises (such as meditation or watching a funny video clip) and our physiology, particularly the benefits to our heart rate and the implication of this on long-term health.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

**Sleep Log:** Sleep is something that many teenagers lack. Students will keep a log of their sleep hours and try to get an additional 30 minutes of sleep each night, and then report on whether it changes their sense of well-being.

**Product:** Log and 1-page journal entry in which students will detail what changes they experience over the course of the week. This journal piece is designed to be an introspective look into their sleep habits so they can identify and understand how and why their sleep may be suffering. Follow up activities to this include creating an action plan to overcome identified sleep obstacles and finding time within their day to incorporate mindfulness periods and exercise bursts to combat sleep deprivation.

### **Unit 9: Perfection and Creativity**

In this unit, students will understand the characteristics, consequences, and sources of perfectionism and will begin to internalize this knowledge to their own lives. They will be introduced to the difference between perfectionism and excellence and understand why striving toward excellence,

not perfectionism, is a healthier paradigm. Dr. Carol Dweck's research on harmful versus helpful praise will be explored to show students the importance of focusing on effort versus intelligence to allow themselves a sense of control. Techniques such as active acceptance and setting a liberating vision will be introduced as tools for overcoming perfectionism and as precursors to exploring creativity. The major tenets of the creative process will be explored and students will be expected to improve their creative abilities by following these tenets.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Satisfaction: Students will consider what their time is worth, and use that to guide their next decision. They will review recent decisions for how much time they spent making them and how happy they are with them. They will consider imposing an arbitrary restriction on simple decisions, such as no more than 2 stores/sites, no more than 15 minutes for a \$15 purchase, etc. Students will learn to accept imperfection and to be grateful for what they have. Product: 1-page journal entry reflecting on key concepts of the unit, including active acceptance, helpful praise, and how applying the major tenets of the creative process has changed their outlook in the short term and how it could potentially change their outlook on major decisions they have coming up in their lives (i.e., college admissions, college choice, course selections, continuing with a sport).

### **Unit 10: Change, Setting Goals, Forming Positive Habits and Crafting Our Calling**

In this unit, students will be introduced to the benefits of setting self-concordant goals as a tool toward long-lasting, positive change. Through in-class activities and reflections, students will begin to recognize that the process of striving for goals—rather than goal attainment per se—is what is crucial for happiness and positive affectivity. They will see goals as liberating tools that allow them to resolve internal conflicts and be fully present. Self-concordance will be introduced by exploring the balance between accurate self-perceptual abilities and the ability to resist social pressures that may sometimes push one in inappropriate directions. They will also explore the relationship between money, materialism, and happiness, and the roles of relativity and adaptation. The role of stress in our lives and how to deal with stress effectively will be covered as well as the distinguishing factors between positive and negative stress. Students will then be introduced to Wrzesniewski's Work Orientation Theory, and the unit will end with lessons that focus on the transition from goals to action and techniques to forming positive habits.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

Students will choose one habit they want to establish or eliminate and then will develop a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based (SMART) goal for achieving that result. They will reflect on their progress. Product: SMART goal and 2 page journal reflection that details their experience with their goal and the outcome.

### **Unit 11: Social Support Structures / Relationship, Love, Empathy, Forgiveness, and Healthy Communication**

Research shows that social support is the most valuable resource for short- and long-term happiness. In this unit, students will first be introduced to research studies such as Harvard's Men Study, Extremely Happy People (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and Sean Achor's study of 1600 Harvard Undergraduates. With the biological, physical, and psychological benefits in mind, students will be asked to reflect about whether they are maximizing the benefits they can get from their social support networks. They will engage in activities that will train them to "use" their social support networks in times where most people do not (for example, in times of stress).

The unit will then shift focus and students will be introduced to John Gottman's work on healthy relationships. They will learn about what makes relationships thrive and grow stronger over time,

and the different shapes that love can take in intimate and platonic relationships. The class will spend time learning the distinction between love as portrayed by the media and love in healthy, long-term relationships; the importance of allowing for positive conflict in relationships; and the 5-to-1 positive affirmation to negative statement ratio. Finally, students will learn healthy communication skills, such as “I” statements, active listening, and setting healthy boundaries.

#### *Summary of Key Assignments and/or Activities*

**Active-Constructive Listening:** Students will practice active-constructive (positive and enthusiastic) responding, such as, “That’s great! I bet you’ll receive more raises!” They will track their baseline for a few days, and then they will try to be more active-constructive. Students will reflect on the question: Do people respond differently to you, and do you feel any differently? **Product:** Baseline results and 1-page journal reflection that should include specific examples of conversations they had in which active listening skills were utilized and the outcome of their conversations. The reflection should also include supposition for how they plan to use these skills moving forward and in what areas of their lives they could most be useful.

### **California State Standards (CSS) for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects**

#### *CSS Writing Standards 9-10*

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
  - a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.
  - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
  - d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
  - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
  - a. Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension. CA
  - b. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.
  - c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
  - d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

- e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
  - f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information visibly and dynamically.
  7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
  8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation including footnotes and endnotes.

#### *CSS Speaking and Listening Standards 9-10*

1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
  - b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
  - c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
  - d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

#### *CSS Language Standards 9-10*

3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
6. Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

#### *CSS Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 9-10*

1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
6. Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

### **Instructional Methods and/or Strategies**

Instructional methods and strategies will be diverse and inclusive. They will include direct instruction and scaffolding instruction to deliver the main content points with an emphasis on organized note taking and summarizing to ensure comprehension. Reinforcement methods and strategies would include project based learning, the use of digital labs and simulations and cooperative learning activities. The use of Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT's) will be used as both instructional strategies and assessment tools.

### **Assessment Methods and/or Tools**

Assessment methods will include traditional summative and formative assessments including:

- multiple choice assessments
- essay assessments
- short answer responses
- journal responses
- presentations

A formative assessment method, Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) will also be utilized. These are generally simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities designed to give teachers and students useful feedback on the teaching-learning process as it is happening.