

## The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic

### Level 1: Elementary

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Are you more optimistic or pessimistic? Why?
2. What do you do when you have very negative thoughts?
3. Do you remember the good things that happened to you?
4. What small good thing has happened to you recently?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

optimist

embarrass

thankful

sportier

1. \_\_\_\_\_: a person who usually expect good things to happen
2. \_\_\_\_\_: better at sports or more athletic
3. \_\_\_\_\_: feeling grateful or appreciative
4. \_\_\_\_\_: to make yourself look silly or awkward in front of others

household

catastrophising

prone

journalling

5. \_\_\_\_\_: writing regularly in a personal journal
6. \_\_\_\_\_: imagining the worst possible result of a situation
7. \_\_\_\_\_: a home and the people who live there
8. \_\_\_\_\_: to have a habit of doing something

**The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic**

**Level 1:** Elementary

**b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.**

1. She has a habit of \_\_\_\_\_, imagining that a small problem will become a disaster.
2. My younger brother was always \_\_\_\_\_ than me and spent most afternoons playing football.
3. I am \_\_\_\_\_ to staying in bed all day on Sundays.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ on the team believed the project would succeed despite the early problems.
5. He tried not to \_\_\_\_\_ his friend by pointing out the mistake in front of everyone.
6. I felt \_\_\_\_\_ for the help my colleagues gave me during my first week.
7. He started \_\_\_\_\_ every evening to reflect on his day.
8. My \_\_\_\_\_ includes me, my boyfriend and my dog.

## The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic

### Level 1: Elementary

*Growing up in a difficult household taught me to expect the worst. Then one day I found £20 in the street and shifted my thinking*

**Maybelle Morgan**

**16 February, 2026**

- 1 When I was young, I felt jealous of one type of person: optimists. They were not always smarter, sportier, or more popular than me, but they believed things would be OK. Before exams or social events, they often said, "It will be fine." My mind said the opposite: "You might embarrass yourself. You might fail." Thinking about problems was normal for me.
- 2 I was a big worrier. I grew up in a difficult home where my father's mood changed quickly. Every morning, when I woke up, I told myself the day would be bad. I believed that expecting the worst was safer. If something good happened, it felt like a surprise.
- 3 This habit continued when I was an adult. Before dates, job interviews, or presentations, I told myself they would not go well. When something good happened, I thought it was only luck. Imagining the worst situations often kept me awake at night. In therapy I learned I was prone to catastrophising. Exercising, journalling, and meditating helped me at times, but the worry sometimes returned when I was stressed.

- 4 Last year something small changed my thinking. One day I found a £20 note on the street. It felt lucky, so I wrote it in my phone. Later, when I walked to a crossing, the light turned green, and the next two lights were green too. It felt funny and surprising, so I wrote that down as well.
- 5 After that day, I started making a list of good things that happened to me. Some were big, but many were small. A train arrived just when I got to the platform. A neighbour brought me a slice of cake. Writing good things down became part of my day.
- 6 Soon I noticed that people often helped me. When my alarm rang in the morning, I believed good things could happen that day. Going to social events alone felt easier because I expected friendly conversations.
- 7 I still worry sometimes. On difficult days, reading my list helps me remember good moments. It also reminds me to feel thankful for the kindness and luck I see around me.
- 8 Now I believe something new: noticing good things can help you see more of them.

© Guardian News and Media 2026

First published in *The Guardian*, 16/02/2026

## The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic

### Level 1: Elementary

#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions with True or False using information from the article. Correct the false statements.

1. When she was growing up, the author was jealous of sporty kids. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The author suggests that she was a negative person because of her difficult homelife as a child.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Journalling and meditation didn't work at all to help with her worrying. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Everything changed when she went to a party. \_\_\_\_\_
5. She started to make notes on her phone every time something good happened.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Taking notes helped her to see the world differently. \_\_\_\_\_
7. She never reads the list; she just likes to write it. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The list is another way to practise gratitude. \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4 Key language

a. Label the sentence with the words below.

noun

object

pronoun

subject

verb

Meditating helped me.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic

## Level 1: Elementary

b. Complete the sentences using the words in the box.

watching

learning

reading

listening

running

- \_\_\_\_\_ helps me relax after work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is good for your health.
- \_\_\_\_\_ a new language takes time.
- I enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ movies at the weekend.
- She loves \_\_\_\_\_ to music while she works.

c. Choose an activity that makes you happy or optimistic. Write a sentence like the ones above and share with a partner.

---

---

## 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- It's easy to go from feeling pessimistic to being optimistic.
- Pessimism is an easier way to live.
- Making a list of the small, good things in life is a good idea.
- It's hard to find time for mental health exercises like journalling, meditation and lists.

## 6 In your own words

a. Think about small changes you could make to live a more positive life and write a five-sentence article explaining them. Use these questions to guide your ideas.

- What things often make you scared or angry?
- What do you do when you feel that way?
- What activities make you feel happy or relaxed?

**The one change that worked: When good things happen, I write them down – and it's made me more optimistic**

## **Level 1:** Elementary

- When can you do these things in your normal routine?
- What will you do less of to be more positive?

**b. In small groups, share your sentences. Give corrections and share your opinions.**