

Three Funny Things

Write down the three funniest things from your day — and why they were funny.

15 min practice + 5 min journal

Standard practice

Handwritten journal, dated & timed

GGIA difficulty: Casual



1 Why you should try it

Many of us spend our days on serious matters, doing serious work and having serious conversations. Taking some time to reflect on the silly could help you reclaim some playful lightheartedness in your life.

Research shows that humor is powerful: it can drive bonding between people and learning in the classroom. Laughter has physical effects on our bodies — it releases dopamine, increases blood flow, and strengthens the heart. And seeing the humor in a tough situation can even be a healthy way to cope. Perhaps that's why Three Funny Things, in particular, has been shown to reduce depression and boost happiness for months after just one week of practice.

2 The session — Prof. Magee's 15-minute protocol

Follow these timings, not the website's. Set a timer. One session = the 15 minutes below, then 5 minutes of journaling immediately after. At least 4 sessions in your 2-week window — ideally every evening for a week straight, the way the original study did it.

2'

3'

3'

3'

4'

2 MIN Replay the day for laughs

Sit down, breathe, and run back through the day hunting for anything that made you laugh, smirk, or shake your head — something you heard, saw, did, or experienced. Small counts ("my friend made a face") as much as large ("I went to a comedy show").

3 MIN Funny thing #1

Give it a title. Write exactly what happened, in detail — who said what, what you did. Then describe how it made you feel. Finally answer the odd but important question: *why did this funny event happen?* The "why" is tricky at first and gets easier over the week.

3 MIN Funny thing #2

Same recipe: title, detail, feeling, why. Try for a different flavor of funny — absurd, witty, physical, a shared joke.

3 MIN Funny thing #3

Title, detail, feeling, why. If you're stuck, think about texts, memes, overheard lines, pets, or things that went wrong in a harmless way.

4 MIN Reread and relive

Read the three entries back. Notice whether the amusement returns — that re-experiencing is part of the mechanism. Then note one place tomorrow where you'd bet something funny will happen.

3 Then journal — 5 minutes, by hand

- Top of the entry: **date and time**. Entries without both lose credit.
- Write for **5 minutes without stopping** (about 300 words). Messy is fine; stopping is not.
- Before / during / after: how did you feel at each point? Be specific — body, mood, thoughts.
- What surprised you? What felt fake, awkward, or easier than expected?
- **Prompt:** Was it harder to find funny things than good things? What kinds of moments did you dismiss as "not funny enough"?
- **Prompt:** Did writing the *why* change the way you see the people involved?

4 Evidence that it works

Wellenzohn, S., Proyer, R. T., & Ruch, W. (2016)

In this study, participants who journaled about Three Funny Things every evening for a week decreased in depression immediately afterward, and increased in happiness up to six months later, compared to a control group who journaled about their early memories.

5 Why it works

Three Funny Things encourages us to focus on the good things in life — in particular, those entertaining, absurd, or knee-slapping moments. Rather than ruminating about problems, we direct our attention to particularly fun and pleasant experiences, often ones that involve other people. By spending time reflecting in this way, we have the opportunity to relive that amusement in the present. Journaling about Three Funny Things could also shift our long-term perspective: over time, we may become quicker to laugh and more open to seeing the humor in everyday life.

6 Know the research — for your presentation (APA 7)

In your presentation you will explain, **from memory and without notes**, the evidence behind each practice — who studied it, when, and what they found — plus something *not* written on the GGIA site or on this handout. Read these papers (SJNY library or Google Scholar), then follow their citations forward to find **your own article** — one more peer-reviewed study on this topic that is not the source study here (due Sun Dec 6). Take photos along the way; they are your slides.

Wellenzohn, S., Proyer, R. T., & Ruch, W. (2016). Humor-based online positive psychology interventions: A randomized placebo-controlled long-term trial. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(6), 584–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137624>

Adapted for PSY 251 from Greater Good in Action, Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley — original at https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/three_funny_things. Practice sources: Willibald Ruch, Ph.D., and Sara Wellenzohn, University of Zurich; René Proyer, Ph.D., Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. Timings, session structure, and journal rules are Prof. Magee's and override the website's.