



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE SCIENCE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive psychology is a research movement that investigates the conditions under which individuals and communities flourish. Instead of treating mental life primarily as a catalogue of disorders, it asks what enables people to function well, sustain meaning, and recover from adversity. The approach gained a high-profile platform in 1998 when Martin Seligman, then president of the American Psychological Association, used his presidential address to argue that psychology had become lopsided: it had produced refined diagnostic systems and treatments for dysfunction, but far fewer tools for explaining purpose, strengths, and long-term wellbeing.

From the outset, the field had to confront a deceptively simple question: how should wellbeing be measured? Early studies relied heavily on self-report surveys of subjective wellbeing—ratings of life satisfaction, positive affect, and perceived meaning.

Researchers drew on ideas later popularised through Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on "flow", describing deep engagement in tasks where challenge and skill are well matched. These instruments enabled large longitudinal studies, but they also exposed weaknesses that are difficult to eliminate: people interpret rating scales differently, cultural norms affect what "happiness" is taken to mean, and an individual's response can be distorted by temporary moods or recent events.

To reduce the risk of collapsing wellbeing into a single feeling, theorists proposed multi-component models. One widely cited formulation, Seligman's PERMA framework, distinguishes positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Other models separate pleasure from purpose, stressing that a meaningful life may involve discomfort—caring for a sick relative, training for a marathon, or campaigning against injustice. In these approaches, wellbeing is not a momentary mental "state" but a pattern of experiences and resources accumulating over time, shaped by values, roles, and opportunities.

As measurement improved, researchers began testing interventions designed to raise wellbeing. Short "gratitude exercises", writing about "three good things", acts of kindness, and identifying personal strengths were proposed as practical techniques. Meta-analysis—pooling results across many trials—suggests that such activities can yield small to moderate average benefits, particularly for people who choose practices they find personally meaningful. Yet the same reviews show substantial variation: gains can fade when exercises are done mechanically, or when they lack personal relevance,



and some participants show little change at all. These findings reinforced a basic principle of psychological science: average effects do not guarantee identical outcomes for everyone.

The popularity of interventions also triggered debates about context. Critics argued that positive psychology can imply that wellbeing is mainly a matter of mindset, thereby shifting responsibility onto individuals. However, decades of public-health research indicates that societal determinants strongly influence mental health: income security, housing conditions, exposure to discrimination, neighbourhood safety, and job stability. Chronic stress can be tracked biologically through elevated cortisol levels and altered sleep, and the body's capacity for neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to reorganise in response to experience—depends partly on whether environments are supportive or threatening. Increasingly, researchers emphasise that flourishing depends on both internal skills and external supports.

These tensions become visible when positive psychology is applied in institutions. Employers have adopted wellbeing programmes to boost morale and reduce burnout, while schools teach social-emotional learning and resilience skills. Used carefully, such programmes can strengthen coping and relationships; used cynically, they may become a substitute for structural improvements, such as manageable workloads, fair pay, or respectful leadership. Ethical concerns arise when “wellbeing” language is used to demand optimism, discouraging staff from reporting harmful conditions. The same intervention that is helpful in one setting can become problematic in another, depending on power and incentives.

Measurement, meanwhile, continues to evolve beyond classic surveys. Experience sampling methods prompt participants to report feelings in real time, reducing memory bias and capturing fluctuations across days. Researchers also use behavioural data (such as social interaction patterns) and physiological indicators (including heart-rate variability), aiming to connect subjective reports with observable processes. Yet every method has limitations: physiological measures can be noisy, behavioural traces can be ambiguous, and combining data sources raises privacy concerns. In addition, the field has faced a broader replication crisis in psychology, where some early findings did not reproduce as strongly when tested later with larger samples and stricter statistics. This has intensified a replication debate and encouraged more transparent practices, such as preregistration and open data.

Overall, positive psychology has widened the discipline's agenda, prompting researchers to study meaning, strengths, and relationships alongside distress. Its credibility, however, depends on disciplined measurement, careful claims about



mechanisms, and realism about what interventions can achieve. Future progress will require honesty about effect sizes, not only in laboratory studies but also in workplaces and schools, where structural conditions may determine whether individual-level techniques can take root. In that sense, the science of flourishing is inseparable from the environments in which people try to live well.

Questions 1–4

Select the correct answer.

1 The 1998 APA address is described as arguing that psychology had become “lopsided” because it

- A** prioritised community wellbeing while neglecting individuals’ emotions
- B** developed refined tools for diagnosing dysfunction but fewer tools for explaining purpose and wellbeing
- C** rejected surveys as unscientific and relied only on physiological indicators
- D** focused mainly on short-term mood rather than long-term mental illness

2 In discussing early wellbeing surveys, the passage mentions which weakness of self-report measures?

- A** They cannot be used in longitudinal studies because results always change
- B** They require respondents to remember feelings from many years earlier
- C** People interpret rating scales differently, which can distort comparisons
- D** They systematically exaggerate negative emotion more than positive emotion

3 What does the passage imply about multi-component models of wellbeing?

- A** Wellbeing is best understood as a pattern of experiences and resources over time, not a single feeling
- B** Pleasure is always more important than purpose in predicting wellbeing
- C** Relationships are considered irrelevant once autonomy is achieved
- D** Meaning cannot be studied empirically because it is purely philosophical

4 What does the passage suggest about common positive-psychology interventions?

- A** Their effects are large and stable across all participants
- B** They only work when physiological indicators are measured simultaneously
- C** They mainly succeed because they eliminate negative emotion altogether
- D** Average benefits can be small to moderate, vary across people, and may fade over time

Questions 5–9



Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

5 The passage suggests that cultural norms can shape what people understand by the term “happiness”.

6 The passage states that positive-psychology interventions produce the same outcomes for every participant.

7 Critics are described as warning that positive psychology can shift responsibility for wellbeing onto individuals.

8 The passage states that experience sampling has replaced surveys as the primary measurement method in the field.

9 The passage suggests that combining multiple data sources can raise privacy concerns.

Questions 10–13

Complete the sentences below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

10 Meta-analytic findings indicate that gains may fade when practices lack personal

11 The passage emphasises that flourishing relies on internal skills and external

12 The replication crisis is described as intensifying a replication within psychology.

13 The passage states that credibility will require honesty about effect

Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. D
5. TRUE



6. FALSE
7. TRUE
8. NOT GIVEN
9. TRUE
10. relevance
11. supports
12. debate
13. sizes