

A GUIDE TO:

# FOSTERING POSITIVE EMOTIONS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS



The science of psychology has a reputation for focusing on the dysfunctional aspects of human life, including negative emotions, weaknesses, despair, and pathology (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Over the years, positive psychology emerged as a wider lens to capture a holistic view of human experiences (Hart, 2021). Barbara Fredrickson introduced the “big 10” [positive emotions](#) and suggested that the ability to experience them is a fundamental human strength that helps individuals flourish, improve resiliency, increase resourcefulness, and enhance optimal functioning in their daily life (Fredrickson, 2013; Gruber et al., 2019; Hart, 2021). In academic settings, positive emotions have been connected to the acquisition of skills that foster academic success, increase student engagement, improve trust and social engagement, and improve well-being (Hart, 2021). Listed below are four positive emotions and best practices to encourage positive emotions in your class.

- **Hope.** Hope is triggered by unpleasant situations when an individual can envision the possibility that things could change for the better (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Students who experience hope demonstrate greater problem-solving, openness to learning, and are more likely to stay enrolled in college because of their optimism and resilience (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Strategies for helping students build hope include:
  - [Setting clear and SMART goals](#)
  - Allowing students an opportunity to outline their own goals for your course
  - Reducing deficit thinking,
  - Enhancing students' strengths
  - Telling stories or using testimonials of previous students' success
- **Interest.** Interest arises from an individual's curiosity and willingness to safely explore and learn to accrue knowledge (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Research suggests that students who are more engaged with their sense of interest frequently learn for the sake of learning and develop a diverse set of knowledge, skills, and lived-experience (Fredrickson, 2013). Strategies for encouraging interest emotion in the classroom include:
  - [Increasing the intrinsic value of learning tasks](#)
  - Allowing students to [co-create grading rubrics](#) and/or class policies
  - Helping students develop a [growth mindset](#).
- **Awe.** Awe emerges as a feeling an individual gets in the presence of something larger than themselves, which challenges their conventional way of seeing the world (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Literature indicates that prompting awe in the learning space can inspire students to discover a purpose in life, enhance life satisfaction, and increase a stronger desire to assist others (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021; Zakrzewski, 2013). Strategies for encouraging students to absorb their awe experience:
  - Implementing [experiential learning activities](#)
  - Using [reflection activities](#)
- **Amusement.** Amusement arises from playful and non-serious social interactions with the environment (Fredrickson, 2013; Hart, 2021). Encouraging the amusement emotion provides the opportunity for individuals to practice complex skills in a safe space, where serious consequences are minimal (Fredrickson, 2013). Strategies for helping students optimize their learning and build social bonds:
  - Designing tasks to [promote active learning](#)
  - Implementing [case-based learning](#)

## References

Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Positive emotions broaden and build. In P. Devine & A. Plant (Eds.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 47, pp. 1–54). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00001-2>

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Hart, R. (2021). *Positive psychology: The basics*. Routledge.

Zakrzewski, V. (2013, June 11). How awe can help students develop purpose. *Greater Good Magazine*. [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_awe\\_can\\_help\\_students\\_develop\\_purpose](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_awe_can_help_students_develop_purpose)

