# Always look on the bright side of life – how to boost your positivity

The power of positive thinking

As creatives we make a lot of difference. We all know – and study after study confirms this – that participating in the arts, taking a creative course, class or workshop is good for people's wellbeing. During the pandemic millions of people turned to the arts to help see them through. **But what about us, the people making that happen? How can we remain positive against the backdrop of what it's like to work for yourself in the creative sector? How can we 'work for ourselves' in another sense - by doing all that we can to develop and retain an optimistic outlook?**

We all know that positive thinking can lead to a lot of positive change in our lives, and is good for both our physical and mental health. And if you didn't know that, then the other resources in the Staying Positive section of our Balance toolkit will fill you in on all of this.
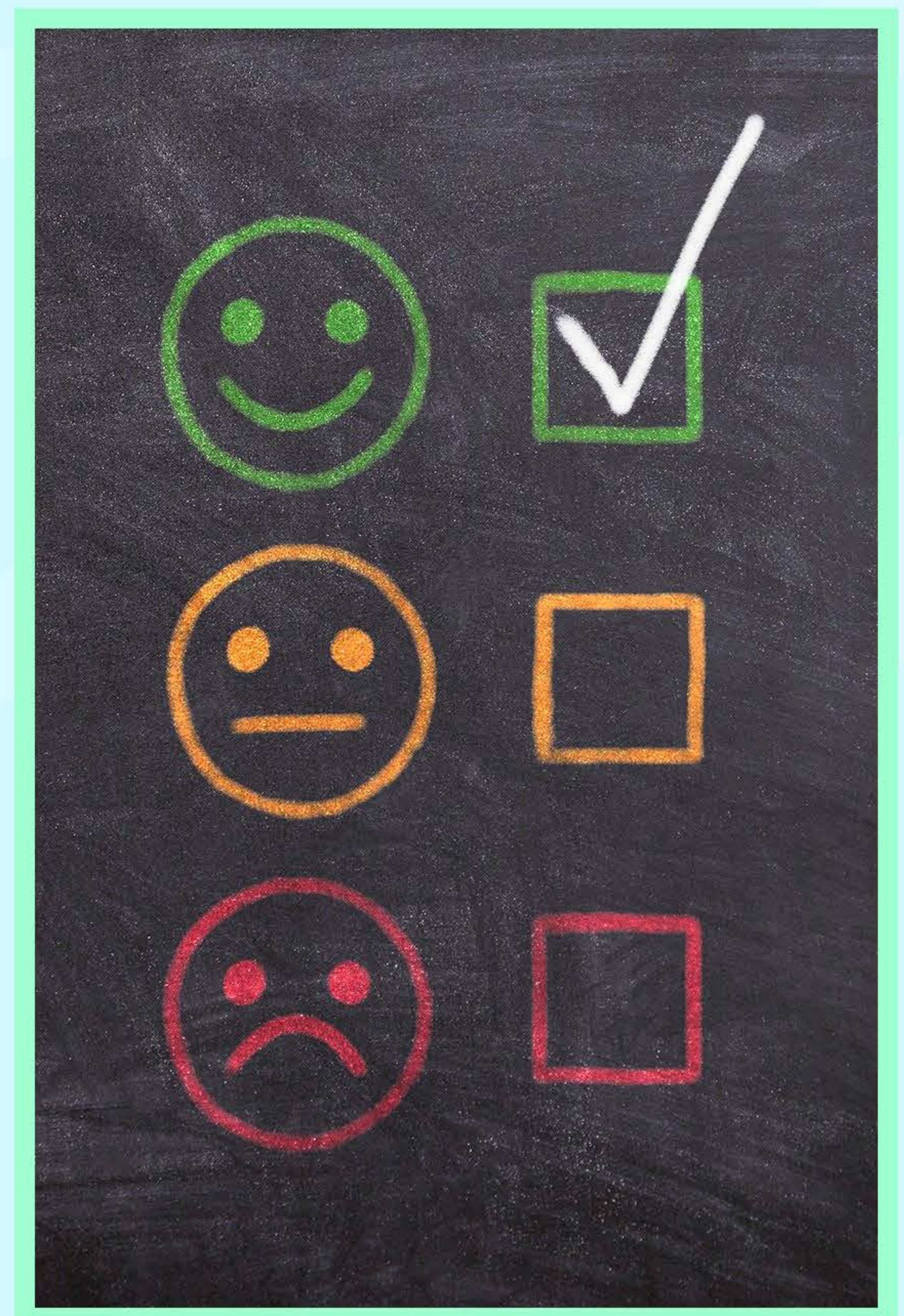
How to make friends with positive thinking

As fellow creatives, you'll know that there are times when it's hard to be positive. A global pandemic is one for sure, but also smaller setbacks like not getting a part or a job, or when you feel totally overwhelmed and weighed down with stress.

We're here for you though, and – together with a bunch of other curious and generous creatives – have compiled a list of ways to boost positive thinking that work for us. We hope they're as useful to you as they continue to be for us!

Focus on the good things

So this is easier said than done. We know that. **But when you're faced with a challenging situation, it really helps if you can step back and try to find the proverbial silver lining.** There's no way you can do that when you're initially reeling or raging, but if you can grab a cup of tea and don your more reflective hat, that can help find some potential up sides to what you're facing.

Challenging situations and obstacles are a part of life, and a key part of developing a more resilient response to what life throws at us is finding a way to see those upsides. So try to train yourself to counter your immediate negative responses to a challenge with at least one positive outcome of it. It gets easier over time, as it becomes a habit!

POSITIVE VIBES

Positivity is contagious, so spend time with positive people

There's that saying right, that you are the average of the five people you spend most time with. So here's the thing… **spending time with friends, colleagues and family members who are positive people means their positivity is likely to rub off on you**. Research suggests that you'll start to adopt some of their positive thinking habits and traits.

Conversely, surround yourself with constant complainers, and their negativity is likely to rub off on you. If you think about how you feel after hanging out with certain friends, other people in your co-working space, you'll see how this works. So, think about who in your circles tends to have a positive outlook, and seek them out!

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Become your own cheerleader - replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk

If you're anything like us, you're probably your harshest critic, someone who sets only the highest standards. Like we've said before, many of us in the creative sector tend to employ ourselves badly, be the kind of employer we'd never work for in other circumstances.

If you constantly berate yourself for your 'failings', and never take time to celebrate your 'wins', over time this means you'll develop a really negative opinion of yourself that will then be hard to shake. It also becomes a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It can be hard to know if you're doing this if it's become engrained, but thoughts or statements that include words like 'always' or 'never' are a clue (e.g. "I'm never going to get through an audition. I always mess up.")

We're not talking about being unrealistically positive. Research shows that even a small shift in the way we talk to ourselves can increase our ability to cope with stress. Here's what we mean....

YOU CAN!

Say you're a maker who's experimenting with a new process, and it doesn't go quite the way you hoped. Your typical response might be "I really messed that up. What a waste of a day". Instead, try to reframe your thinking so it's more along the lines of "Hmm, so something clearly went wrong. I think it might be x,y,z, so I'll try it again tomorrow doing it differently". **Choose curiosity and learning over negativity. Or think of it as telling the negative committee in your head to shut up, and becoming your own cheerleader!**

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Play detective – identify your areas of negativity

While we're at it, if you're focusing on becoming your loudest cheerleader, it can also help to take a look at the different areas in your life, and identify the ones in which you tend to be the most negative. If you're not sure, maybe ask a friend or colleague, or your partner. The chances are they'll be able to point you in the right direction, gently. Once you've worked out where that negativity tends to reside, you can use your new found cheerleading skills to go to work on tackling the negative thoughts that are behind this. Not sure where to start?

Someone in our team recommends tackling one area at a time, by making a list of all the ways that negative thinking in that area impacts your life and then creating another list that shows how more positive thinking could be beneficial.

Doing this, she says, makes you realise how much better you'd feel if you started to shift your thinking.

Be nice – pay compliments and commit random acts of kindness

We all love a compliment, don't we? **But did you know that offering someone a compliment can also boost your positivity, as well as make them feel good?** Try it, and you'll see that we're right. Not only do you get a boost from seeing the recipient glow, but it also helps you to get into the habit of looking for good in other people. So, look for reasons to compliment people, and try to build a few compliments into every day. Hey, here's a thought, maybe you can even direct a few of them at yourself?!

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And while we're at it, finding a way to perform random acts of kindness works in a similar way. Finding ways to put a smile on the face of others affects you just as much as it affects them. It takes the focus off of you and your problems, and lifts your mood, improves your self esteem and your self-worth. So think of it as an act of kindness to yourself too.

Give thanks – develop a gratitude practice

We were all brought up to say thank you, right? But practicing gratitude isn't only about being polite, it's also been shown to reduce stress, improve self-esteem, and foster resilience. So here's another thing to try…**Find a way every day to express your gratitude to someone who's helped you, makes you happy or brings you comfort**. Maybe you thank a collaborator for their help, your friend for being there, or even your puppy? Another thing that lots of us swear by is keeping a gratitude journal. **There's tonnes of research that shows that writing down the things you're grateful for can improve your optimism and sense of well-being.** Different people do this differently, but the one that works for us is writing down three things every day that we're grateful for that day. It can be anything from 'it was sunny' to 'a brilliant conversation with my friend'. The trick we think is to make it a habit. And once you've got your journal you can always go back to it on bad days when you need a boost.

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Good morning! Start every day on a positive note

Are you a morning person or a night owl? Either way, having your own morning ritual that helps you start each day with something uplifting and positive can be really helpful, especially on bad days.

Everyone's different, so what works for you may not work for someone else. Here are a few ideas, courtesy of our team and wider creative community:

- Start each day by spending some time writing about something you are grateful for.

- Note in your journal what would make that day a great day, and keep that in mind all day.

- Start the day by listing 3 things you are grateful for.

- Tell yourself that it's going to be a great day or any other positive affirmation.

- Make a note of something you learned the previous day.

- Listen to a happy and positive song or playlist.

- Build a reward system into your day; in the morning work out what your lunchtime and/or end of the working day treat will be.

- Share some positivity by giving a compliment or doing something nice for someone.

Hello world! Get out in nature

Seizing any opportunity to get out into nature, and watching the natural changes to the seasons, was definitely one of the things that kept a lot of us going during the pandemic. **Whether it's a stroll in the local park or along a canal bank, or hitting the hills or the moors, research shows that revelling in the great outdoors promotes human health**.

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And what's more, spending time in natural environments has been scientifically proven to lower stress levels, improve working memory and provide a sense of rejuvenation. So, building in some time every day to get outside, breathe air, stare at the sky, really can do wonders for your positivity.

Take a break

Hurray! A really simple one! Think of it like this: exhaustion is the silent killer of positivity. So, as we talked about in our Cracking Productivity resource, it's really important to learn to take breaks when things get overwhelming. Do something that gives your mind a break – make a cup of tea, go for a walk around the block, maybe even have a power nap – and you'll come back feeling more productive and positive. **Taking a break isn't a waste of your time; it's an investment of your time!**

Laughter can be the best medicine

One of our team is a laughter yoga teacher, so they're all over how laughter lowers stress, anxiety, and depression, and also improves coping skills, mood, and self esteem. It turns out that nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh. But, research shows that while children laugh an average of 300 times a day, as adults that drops to just 17 times a day. **Oh oh!**

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So try to find the humour in as many situations as you can, especially the tricky ones. **Finding something to laugh at in all of it will lighten your mood and makes things seem a little less difficult**. And it's fine to fake it, as any laughter yoga devotees amongst you will know. Even if you're not feeling it, pretending or forcing yourself to laugh can improve your mood and lower stress too. Time to get your ha ha on…

Get active

Get outside, do some exercise. This is probably the tip we hear most often from fellow creatives. And they're right. **There's loads of research that shows that getting sweaty, or even just going for a gentle walk, isn't just good for your heart, it's good for your head too**. Scientists report that one of the best ways to chase the blues away is by going for a walk; the act of walking calms you down by sparking nerve cells in the brain that relax your senses. Meanwhile, more vigorous exercise releases the 'feel good' brain chemicals that ease feelings of negativity. It distracts you from your issues, and it physically relaxes you.

So, whether it's a gentle stroll or a fast-paced bums and tums class, getting a bit more active will help you see the bright side.

Celebrate the small wins

Hands up if you don't love a good celebration? Ah yes, we see no hands in the air! And that's good, because **celebrating small victories is one of the quickest ways to give negativity the boot**. On a bad day, being able to get up and dressed is a win. If you didn't quite manage it, and stayed in bed to get some much needed rest, that's a win too. Well done on both counts. Actively seeking out and celebrating things that were good for you, or that you did well, as opposed to focusing on what went wrong or things you didn't do, can make all the difference to your mindset. Try recording all your small wins for a couple of days – maybe writing them down at the end of the day, or when you have your lunch or dinner - and you'll see what we mean!

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Take care of YOURSELF

OK, so this one should really be at the top, because it's at the root of everything, but we saved it to last to make sure you remember it! **Take good care of yourself and you'll be more equipped to think positively. It's not selfish, it's smart.** But it's that classic, and really tricky, combination of something that is really simple conceptually, but that can be really hard to implement practically. So, maybe just cover the basics, and let the rest follow?

Get plenty of rest and exercise, and check out our tips on how to combat stress. If you take care of your physical and mental health you'll have more energy, and be more motivated, to focus on positive thinking.

We really hope that these things that we and those around us find useful will help you too. For more insights along these lines check out all the other resources in the Win Some, Lose Some section of our Balance toolkit.

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