

# PERMA

The modern positive psychology movement began in the late 1990s. Dr. Martin Seligman, who was at the time president of the American psychiatric association, felt that the current field of psychology was too focused on diagnosing and treating psychological disorders and getting patients back to “normal”. Seligman decided to explore the roots of wellness and optimal functioning. Instead of focusing primarily on “What is wrong with you?” positive psychology chooses to focus not just on the absence of misery, but on character strengths and factors that lead to well-being and optimal happiness. In other words, “What is right with you?”.

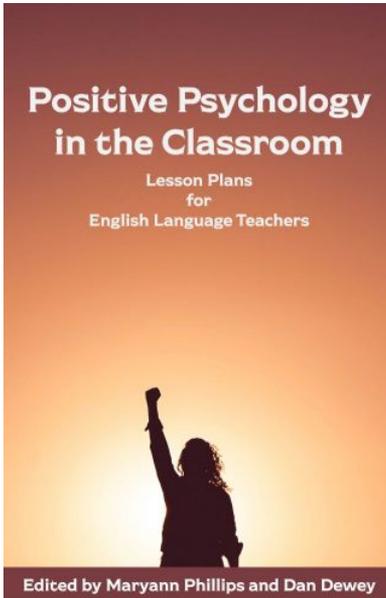
In his book, *Flourish*, Dr. Seligman introduced the acronym PERMA to reflect 5 elements of well-being.

- *P* stands for positive emotion. Positive emotion is more than just feeling happy. It is experiencing emotions such as gratitude, joy, love, and hope. Learning how to experience and foster positive emotions can boost and enhance wellbeing and fulfillment.
- The *E* represents engagement. Feeling excited and absorbed in the activities you are involved in leads to a more fulfilled life. Similar to the concept of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1989) engagement can mean becoming completely engaged with a task to the point that time passes without you noticing. Engagement also entails being resilient and persistent as you work to complete tasks.
- *R* refers to positive relationships. Feeling supported, valued,

and loved by others and reciprocating those sentiments to important people in your life can greatly contribute to an individual's ability to thrive.

- *M* is for meaning and purpose in life outside oneself. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways for different people but seeing value and purpose in life and contributing to the better good is a major component of well-being.
- *A* symbolizes achievement and the satisfaction we feel when we work hard to accomplish a goal despite possible obstacles and setbacks.

Here is a video of Dr. Seligman discussing PERMA:



Phillips, M., , Rogers, C., Summers, M., & McMurry, B. (2022). *Positive Psychology in the Classroom: Lesson Plans for English Language Teachers*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/PositivePsychologyintheClassroom>