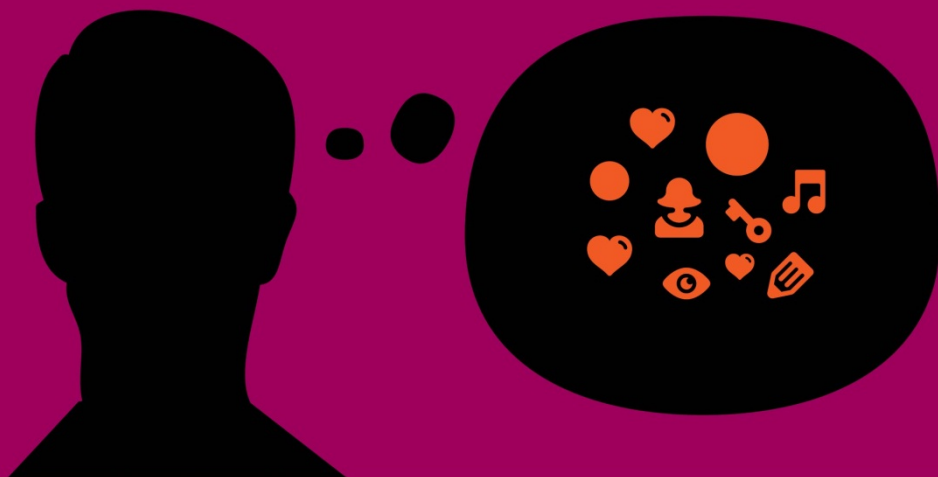


THE SCIENCE OF SELF-AFFIRMATIONS

how to think your way to happiness and success



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The Science of Self-Affirmations

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The Science of Self-Affirmations

Self-affirmations are a popular tool used in self improvement. The basic idea is that we can adopt healthy, positive, and productive beliefs if we recite a belief enough times to ourselves.

For example, if we repeat a thought like “I’m a smart and happy person” 20 times every morning, then we may begin to actually believe that about ourselves, and thus act in ways that could make that belief a self-fulfilling belief.

Reciting these beliefs is said to work because increased repetition of certain thought patterns (and neural pathways) is said to condition our brains to begin thinking in these new ways. It’s kind of like working a muscle: the more repetitions you do, the stronger the thought will become.

This article is going to recap scientific evidence for the different ways self-affirmations have been shown to improve our lives.

Self-affirmations improve willpower and self-control

In one [study](#) published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, researchers found that self-affirmations can improve willpower and self-control.

There is a concept known as “ego depletion” which is the idea that we only have a limited amount of willpower at anytime. Therefore, when we use that willpower in one task (such as doing really difficult math problems), then we are less likely to exercise willpower in a later task (such as not eating a piece of cake).

However, using positive self-affirmations can help us push ourselves just a bit further. It doesn’t give us infinite willpower, but it can help us exercise willpower and self-control when normally we would be fatigued and tired, which provides us with an extra boost of motivation.

This is also one proven way athletes use self-talk to improve practice and performance.

Suggested affirmations for willpower:

- “I can do it!”
- “I have the power in me to make good things happen.”
- “If I believe in myself, I will succeed.”

Self-affirmations improve social confidence

In another [study](#) published in *Psychological Science*, researchers found that the use of self-affirmations can improve confidence and make individuals more welcoming to positive social interactions.

They tested individuals who were chronically insecure and strongly feared social rejection, then found that just 15 minutes of self-affirmations improved their social confidence up to 8 weeks after the intervention.

The use of self-affirmations helps us to take control of the social script we play out inside our heads, and thereby rewrite how we think and approach our daily relationships.

Suggested affirmations for social confidence:

- “People genuinely like me once they get to know me.”
- “I deserve positive relationships in my life.”
- “I have a rich and supportive social circle.”

Self-affirmations improve problem-solving and creativity

In a third [study](#) published in *PLOS ONE*, researchers found that self-affirmations can also be used to improve problem-solving and creativity.

Stress has often been associated with poorer focus, cognition, and problem-solving skills, so researchers tested whether self-affirmations could minimize stress and thereby improve these cognitive abilities.

Participants with chronic stress were given a self-affirmations exercise and then had to complete 30 difficult problem-solving tasks under time pressure in front of an evaluator. It was

discovered that individuals who received the self-affirmations exercise outperformed individuals in the control group.

Suggested affirmations for problem-solving:

- “I take small steps everyday to improve.”
- “I view my obstacles as a guide showing me where to go next.”
- “Stepping outside of my comfort zone is often necessary for growth.”

Start using self-affirmations to improve your life

As you can see from much of this research, self-affirmations can play an important role in improving various domains of our life, allowing us to live happier and successful lives.

The rest of this guide is going to elaborate on why exactly the use of self-affirmations can be so effective, and how we can begin applying self-affirmations to our everyday life.

The Power of Self-fulfilling Beliefs

In psychology, there is a concept known as a *self-fulfilling prophecy* which describes how certain beliefs can influence our actions in a way that makes those beliefs actually come true. It's an example of the positive feedback loop between beliefs → behaviors → outcomes.

The basic idea is that our beliefs have a real effect on the world we live in. We all have a "map of reality" in our heads about how the world works. These beliefs thus affect how we respond to the situations we find ourselves in, which then influences the results we get in life.

The influential American psychologist William James was one of the first to describe self-fulfilling beliefs.

In his work *Will to Believe* from 1896, he explains how going into a relationship with the expectation that someone will like you can then guide you to act in a way (such as warm, open, and friendly) which then fulfills that truth. On the other hand, if you go into a relationship with the expectation that someone won't like you, that can cause you to act in a way (such as insecure, defensive, or rude), which then fulfills your belief that they don't like you.

In the case of self-fulfilling beliefs, either way you are correct – because your beliefs have such a tremendous influence on the outcomes in your life that they later become true.

In 1968, the Rosenthal–Jacobson study became one of the first scientific experiments showing the power of self-fulfilling beliefs. They looked at how teacher’s attitudes about certain students could then influence those student’s actual performance.

The researchers set up a clever study where students took an IQ test and then told teachers that 20% of the students were expected to be “spurters,” meaning they would perform above average compared to most students.

The teachers were told exactly which students were expected to do better. However, in reality the students were chosen at complete random.

Interestingly, it was discovered that the students who teachers *expected* to do better actually ended up doing better in school than the students who weren’t identified as “spurters.” Their self-fulfilling beliefs became true, even though there was no evidence that these students were special in anyway.

How did this happen?

Psychologists believe that even though the teachers may not have been consciously favoring the “spurters,” they may have given them extra time, attention, and effort without realizing it – because deep-down these teachers actually *believed* these students were special.

This is just one of many examples of how self-fulfilling beliefs can have a real world impact.

Take a second now to think about how self-fulfilling beliefs can play both a positive and negative role. For example, what if these teachers were led to believe that these 20% of students were not as smart as the rest of their class? Would they then perform a lot worse?

Now think about how the bigger attitudes in our society affect people of different races, genders, religions, occupations, etc.? If a belief is repeated enough, it can become more and more true. For example, if police go into their job expecting a certain race to be more likely to commit crimes, then they may be more likely to watch out for and arrest certain groups of people – which then reinforces the truth that those people are more likely to commit crimes.

As you can see, self-fulfilling beliefs can play a major role in both our personal lives and society at large. It's therefore important that we are aware of the beliefs and attitudes we have about the world, because they may just be shaping the world into exactly what we want to see.

Creating Your Own Self-Affirmation Exercise

To make the most of self-affirmations, it's a good idea to make your own exercise that is personal to you.

This includes creating your own self-affirmations that are meaningful and resonate with you, and finding ways to utilize these self-affirmations in a way that actually sticks in your brain.

A. Identify a specific situation in your life that you want to improve

The first step is identifying a specific situation in your life that you want to improve. The more specific you are, the easier it'll be to write affirmations focused on that area of your life.

Common situations that you may want to improve through self-affirmations include:

- Improving learning, study, and getting better grades in class.
- Improving athletic performance in a sport or competition.
- Improving creativity as a musician, actor, businessman, painter, etc.
- Improving your confidence in social interactions.

- Improving productivity and focus at work

These are just some suggestions. Step back and decide which area of your life you need to work on most, then choose that one.

B. Create 10 self-affirmations focused on that specific situation

Now the goal is to come up with 10 positive self-affirmations that apply to this specific situation. Here is a short exercise to help jumpstart the process of creating your own self-affirmations:

- Time yourself for 5 minutes and write down as many positive self-affirmations as possible.
- Don't criticize or over-think during the 5 minute exercise, just immediately write down whatever pops into your head. The point is to create a lot of self-affirmations - you'll choose which ones you like best after.
- Try to use words that hold particular meaning to you. If you can integrate concepts from science, philosophy or a religion/tradition that you follow, then use them to make the self-affirmation more effective.
- Now review over what you've written down and choose the 10 you find most inspiring and motivating for you.
- With each of the 10 self-affirmations you've chosen, step back and ask yourself:

- Does it sound better to you in the first-person (“I” or “Me”) or in the third-person (your name: “Steven,” “Amy,” or whatever).
- Does it sound better to you in the present tense “I am..” or the future tense “I will...?”
- Does it sound better to you as a statement (“I will learn a lot today in class.”) or as a question (“Will I learn a lot today in class?”)
- Is there a word or phrase you can change to make this more inspiring or motivating?

Self-affirmations are going to work better depending on the person and situation. Be willing to experiment with your self-affirmations until you find something that works best for you.

And if you’re really having trouble thinking of your own self-affirmations, refer to “Part 4” for a list of 100 self-affirmations to help get you started.

C. The different ways to use self-affirmations

There are a lot of different ways you can integrate self-affirmations throughout your everyday life. Here are some great examples:

- Write down your affirmations on a piece of paper and stick them around the house in places you’re likely to see them

(for example: a bathroom mirror, the fridge, or above your bed).

- Repeat affirmations to yourself 5-10 times in the morning or at night. You can do this in several different ways:
 - Reciting the affirmations inside your mind.
 - Speaking the affirmations out loud.
 - Writing down the affirmation using paper and pen.
- Combine your affirmations with physical activity such as dance, yoga, or stretching.
- Use candles, symbolic objects, and ambient music to help create an “atmosphere” or “ritual” to heighten your self-affirmation experience.
- Make wallpaper for your desktop or phone that combines an inspirational image with your affirmation.
- Make an inspiring poster, collage, or piece of art of your own with your affirmation - and put it up in your room somewhere.
- Try to use your affirmation in everyday conversation whenever it’s appropriate.
- Set up an alert on your desktop or phone to remind yourself of a particular affirmation during the day.
- Make a word document to write down and save all your affirmations. This will be a great resource to go to when you need an extra boost.

Be creative. There are a lot of different ways you can integrate affirmations into your day. The more you surround yourself with these positive affirmations, the more effective they will be.

D. Just 10 minutes of conscious practice a day

You don't need to obsess over your affirmations, often times just a good 5-10 minutes of conscious and focused practice is all you need for a boost. Make sure you schedule a little time in your day to do it - it's not hard, you just need to be dedicated and consistent.

100 Self-Affirmations for Self-Improvement

This is a list of suggested self-affirmations. Try to use these as inspiration to come up with self-affirmations of your own. Or if you're really having trouble creating your own, then feel free to borrow some of these for now.

1. Everyday, in every way, I am getting better and better.
2. Every failure in my life can be a learning experience.
3. I live in the present moment.
4. I create value in other peoples' lives.
5. I am always changing.
6. I am worthy of positive relationships in my life.
7. I wish the best for everyone.
8. I learn something new everyday.
9. I am genuinely interested in other people.
10. I have many strengths and positive characteristics.

11. I don't worry about the things I can't control.
12. Listening to my emotions can help guide me to make better decisions.
13. I see my anxiety as motivation to change or improve.
14. I can overcome obstacles in my life.
15. I am a positive role model to others.
16. I will try something different today.
17. I'm not afraid to step outside of my comfort zone.
18. I believe people are generally good.
19. I forgive anyone who has hurt me in the past.
20. I have a rich and supportive social circle.
21. What doesn't kill me only makes me stronger.
22. My past is one big learning experience.
23. I must be the change I wish to see in the world.
24. I will try to be more understanding of others.
25. My depression is the first stepping stone to happiness.

26. This too shall pass.
27. I can find happiness in every moment.
28. I'm a proactive problem-solver.
29. When I open my mind and senses, I'm much more creative.
30. I can create my own positive energy.
31. When people get to know me, they really like me.
32. Just do it.
33. I can see the bigger picture.
34. I see money as a useful tool for helping myself and others.
35. I take small steps everyday to be healthier.
36. I'm dedicated to my passions in life.
37. I have the resources to take care of my family.
38. My negative emotions can serve a positive function.
39. I determine the meaning of my life.
40. Every decision I make helps shape my future.

41. If I never take risks in life, I'll never be rewarded.
42. I remain focused on what matters most in my life and relationships.
43. I participate in life, I don't wait for it to happen.
44. I will be more conscious when acting and making decisions.
45. I can think rationally and intelligently.
46. I'm dedicated to gradual self-improvement.
47. I treat others with kindness and respect.
48. If I want something I've never had, I must do something I've never done.
49. I know when to relax and not take life so seriously.
50. I learn from my past relationships.
51. I can accept criticism without taking it personally.
52. I love and accept my body.
53. When I love myself, I allow others to love me too.
54. Most of the limitations in my life are fictional.

55. I narrate the story of my life.
56. I exude purpose and joy.
57. All is well, right here, right now.
58. Today, I will open my mind to the endless opportunities surrounding me.
59. I am grateful for the people I have in my life. 60. I am my own best friend.
61. I can find balance in my life.
62. I am mindful of my health and well-being.
63. I exercise freedom in all aspects of my life.
64. I know when to trust my intuition.
65. I can gain knowledge in anything if I'm willing to learn.
66. I strive to achieve my goals and values in life.
67. I can only give happiness to others once I have found happiness in myself.
68. I'm optimistic about the future.
69. I have all the material luxury I need.

70. I will celebrate the small victories in my life and stay motivated by them.

71. I'm interconnected with everything in the universe.

72. I'm productive in achieving what I want in life.

73. Small changes on a daily basis lead to big changes over time.

74. Most of the time there is nothing to fear.

75. When life gets tough, I can persist.

76. I will make the most of this situation.

77. I don't waste my time and energy around toxic people.

78. I'd rather make a mistake than forever regret not trying.

79. I will balance both speaking and listening in my daily conversations.

80. I don't listen to the negative voice in my head.

81. I need to experiment with new things before I can think of myself in new ways.

82. I don't always choose my circumstances, but I do choose how I respond to those circumstances.

83. If I want to understand someone, I need to first let go of my biases and prejudices.

84. I try to see things from other people's perspective.

85. I treat everyone as an equal.

86. I allow myself to let go, be spontaneous, and have fun.

87. I focus on the positive memories in my relationships.

88. I will not let my happiness become dependent on any one person.

89. I have many inspirational role models to learn from and be motivated by.

90. I do kind things for people without the expectation of anything in return.

91. I always act myself around people; I never feel the need to be someone I'm not.

92. I'm not afraid to question my old habits and beliefs.

93. There are always opportunities to meet new people in my life.

94. I don't get easily offended or upset by people.

95. I believe life is meant to be enjoyed.
96. Whatever happens happens.
97. I try my best not to hurt others.
98. I sincerely hope that everyone finds happiness in their lives.
99. I'm willing to pay short term costs for long term gains.
100. I seek to learn new things everyday.

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