**100 Character Exercises**

These exercises are daily practices to strengthen your confidence and resilience in your character in order to live with graceful presence in each moment. They have been taken and adapted from the ancient practice of the Stoic philosophers in the West, from Buddhist practice in the East, and from various religious and indigenous practices around the world, both ancient and modern.

**During the term, you will engage in two character exercises every week. Each week you may choose two more exercises or stay with the ones you did the week before. Every day keep track of how you’re doing on the Character Exercise Record and upload it to canvas on the assignment page each Saturday.**

In the first week of class, you will choose two accountability partners you will help and who will help you to be consistent doing the character exercises. The expectation is that at least once a week, you will be in contact with your accountability partners to remind and coach each other in the performance of your exercises.

1. During the duration of this exercise, practice each day one or more guided meditations. There are many websites and apps to practice meditation, such as *Headspace, MyLife Meditation, and Smiling Mind*.
2. During the duration of this exercise, whenever you are feeling stressed or worried or anxious - Breathe in for a count of five seconds, and then hold for five seconds, and then breathe out for a count of five seconds. Do this five times. Repeat as needed. Or practice “Alternate Nostril Breathing” (Nadi Shodhan Pranayama) Meditation.
3. During the duration of this exercise, three times a day practice bringing attentiveness to:
   1. Posture – How you stand
   2. Movement – How you move
   3. Breath – How you breathe
4. During the duration of this exercise, whenever a negative feeling emerges, don’t hold on to it, but let it pass in 90 seconds. Say, “cancel” to the appearance of any negative or unwholesome thoughts. Stop feeding negative feelings with negative thoughts.

1. During the duration of this exercise, at least once each day free your thinking from any thoughts of greed, lust, anger, hate, conflict, and violence. Imagine feelings of loving kindness towards everyone you come across.
2. During the duration of this exercise, take morning or evening meditative walks.
3. During the duration of this exercise, at the start of each day say “Yes” to your life exactly as it is. Accept the facts of your existence as they are. For each of the things in your life you feel some dissatisfaction towards, identify the hidden gift potentially present within them. Each day write this down as a meditative exercise:

Learning from experience

* Identify (write down) an unpleasant experience you’ve had from your recent past, which, at the time, you wished you could have avoided.
* Identify (write down) some way that you were benefited from that unpleasant experience. Perhaps you developed some new skill, discovered a strength you didn’t know you possessed, or made a new friend.
* Teach yourself that anything that happens to you, or that you experience, provides you with the raw materials for growth and development; with a new palette in the art of being human.
* Repeat this exercise as often as needed. Find the good or what can be learned in everything that happens to you, especially the adverse events in your day – think of the trainer or scout metaphor from stoicism.

1. During the duration of this exercise, express love and gratitude to those who assist you in any way, no matter how small.
2. During the duration of this exercise, complement people—be sure the compliments are sincere.
3. During the duration of this exercise, identify and write down five things you are grateful for in your life right at that moment.
4. During the duration of this exercise, identify three things of beauty you see, hear, or experience.
5. During the duration of this exercise, schedule one-half day where nothing is planned. Just go with the flow – whatever comes up, go with it. If nothing comes up, then enjoy that too.
6. During the duration of this exercise, spend one-half hour each day playing a game or engaging in a playful activity that has no relevance to your job or other required activities. Pay full attention to whatever you are doing in the moment you are doing it.
7. During the duration of this exercise, identify what you fear and then engage it with love that very day!
8. During the duration of this exercise, keep a question journal. A journal where you write down all the questions that come to you during the day.
9. During the duration of this exercise, visit an art museum or gallery and practice contemplation of beautiful works of art. Experience how engaging with beauty moves you beyond your ego-centeredness.
10. During the duration of this exercise, try to spend time with a small child, or even a cat or dog and observe how they are able to simply enjoy and be present in the moment and in any activity in which they are involved.
11. During the duration of this exercise, imagine the worst possible thing that could ever happen to you, then imagine how you could respond to it in a way that would make it a meaningful and an inspirational story for anyone who heard about it. Write a one-page newspaper story reporting the bad thing and your heroic response.
12. During the duration of this exercise, try speed writing. Each day, with a timer set for 5 minutes, begin writing whatever comes as you put pen to paper. Keep your pen moving don't stop for the full 5 minutes. If nothing comes to mind then just scribble and keep the pen moving across the page. Afterwards read it to discover any significant meanings, don’t worry if you find none. Save it and return to it at a later date.
13. During the duration of this exercise, when you wake up be mindful of the first words you say to yourself and of the last words you say to yourself before retiring at night. Are these words helpful or harmful, life enhancing or life diminishing?
14. During the duration of this exercise, go through the entire day making sure that everything you say is accurate, useful, and ennobling. Be honest and transparent in your thoughts, words, and deeds.
15. During each day find opportunities to forgive. Replace angry and hateful thoughts with kind and compassionate thoughts. Think of someone who might have offended you or caused you some unpleasantness. Forgive them in your thoughts right now and then find the next opportunity to express this to them in person. Be cautious, it is possible they had no idea they had caused some offense. Stop yourself from saying anything harmful to someone or about someone.
16. During the duration of this exercise, think of someone whom you might have offended or caused some unpleasantness. Apologize and ask them to forgive you. Be cautious, it is possible they weren’t aware of this experience.
17. During the duration of this exercise, throughout the day recall being with someone who really loves you. This activity stimulates areas of the brain that will prime you to have compassion for others.
18. During the duration of this exercise, look for some small but good deed you can perform. Do six such good deeds during each day of the exercise. Imagine to yourself the suffering of another human being, and then imagine what you could do to relieve it.
19. During the duration of this exercise, go through at least one entire day with no other intent than to find people you may serve in some way. What you desire for yourself, seek to acquire for others. (Respect, Safety, Security, Freedom, and Meaning)
20. During the duration of this exercise, act toward your partner, spouse, or friends as if you were meeting them for the first time and wanted to make a good impression.
21. During the duration of this exercise, at the start make a list of people you dislike, despise, or feel any anger or hostility towards, then at the beginning of each day send out thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic sorrow and joy, forgiveness, and disinterested benevolence to them. Perhaps by writing down the positive traits you can imagine they possess. Do this daily until you no longer feel any negative feelings towards them. Find the good in all people, even your enemies, or people you don’t like.
22. During the duration of this exercise, defuse conflict with kindness.
23. During the duration of this exercise, do some act of service anonymously for someone who could never reciprocate. Do some act of service anonymously for someone you don’t like and have considered an enemy.
24. During the duration of this exercise, really listen to someone each day. Each day smile at people, refrain from gossip, but instead say something positive.
25. During the duration of this exercise, do volunteer work each day.
26. During the duration of this exercise, try to have compassion for five kinds of people: someone you are grateful to, a loved one or friend, a neutral person, someone who is difficult for you, and yourself.
27. During the duration of this exercise, turn any hindrances or obstacles you meet during the day into exciting opportunities and new paths forward by not getting angry or resisting, but by looking at the new situation or circumstance and asking yourself, “What good action can I do right now, right here?” Then act upon what the new situation makes possible.
28. During the duration of this exercise, do something that is unpleasant, but not dangerous or unethical, that teaches you that you can do difficult things. For example, take a cold shower or put away any screen for a few hours.
29. During the duration of this exercise, whenever you begin to feel discouraged, depressed, frustrated or just bored and unsatisfied, stop whatever you are doing and find someone to serve.
30. During the duration of this exercise, think of some effort – thought or action – you do habitually, which only produces unpleasant results for you—e.g. too much TV, Internet, food, boredom, or negative thinking about others—think of some alternative but positive effort you can replace it with when it arises each day of this exercise.
31. During the duration of this exercise, each day do morning planning and reflection. Examine what you need to accomplish each day and schedule when you will accomplish it. Schedule important activities like exercise and studying.
32. During the duration of this exercise, practice remembrance of good things: e.g. List the good qualities of family and friends. Look through old family albums to prod memory. Recall three goods things that happened to you that day.
33. During the duration of this exercise, at the start write down five things you are currently worrying about. Chose one and identify three aspects of that “problem” you can do nothing about. Let them go! Identify three things you might do to successfully resolve this “problem.” Schedule a time later today to plan a course of action on the three aspects you can control. Each day focus on what you can control and let go of what you cannot.
34. During the duration of this exercise, at the end of each day do the following self-evaluation: one, ask, “What major mistakes did I make today?” “What can I learn from these mistakes?” “What did I learn today?” “What was the best thing that happened to me today?”
35. During the duration of this exercise, make a list of situations that trigger strong negative emotions (first darts) in you like greed, lust, anger, hatred, etc. Then imagine yourself responding to each situation as it arises by just letting it arise and then die without any effort. (Without throwing the second dart!)
36. During the duration of this exercise, take fifteen minutes each day, find a comfortable place to sit where you’ll have no distractions, and just pay attention to how thoughts, feelings, and desires come and go in your mind. Don't respond to them, but just quietly observe them all as they appear and disappear on their own in a matter of seconds.
37. During the duration of this exercise, at the end of each day, reflect on one situation or encounter that didn’t go as you had hoped. Then consider what you did do and what you should have done. Compare the two actions and reflect on how this may help you the next time you are in a similar situation.
38. During the duration of this exercise, go out of your way to meet new people and engage with others with whom you would normally not connect. During the time of this exercise, take someone out to lunch, with whom you normally don’t associate.
39. During the duration of this exercise, research a new hobby, which has always interested you, but is inexpensive and easy to learn.
40. During the duration of this exercise, each day spend time outside – green spaces with flowing water have biggest affect on mood.
41. During the duration of this exercise, prepare for moments of boredom and drowsiness. Have at the ready easy and enjoyable activities you can do for whenever you feel bored or tired during the time of this exercise.
42. During the duration of this exercise, whenever you feel like complaining about something, stop yourself. Instead think of something you can do right now to remove the cause of the complaint, or if there is nothing you can do, then just let it go.
43. During the duration of this exercise, do tasks as they arise – do your duty as it arises.
44. During the duration of this exercise, look for the familiar in new and frightening events. Look for what is new and exciting in familiar events.
45. During the duration of this exercise, identify a few things you’ve wanted to accomplish this year, but have been procrastinating. Review your list and choose the one thing you’d most like to accomplish – that would add the greatest value to your life. What is one thing you could do each day of this exercise that would begin to achieve this goal? Schedule those activities – the next step and do it! Ask yourself: “What have I been procrastinating?” and “What courageous act will I perform today?”
46. During the duration of this exercise, at the start of this exercise, identify a difficult circumstance you’ve been dealing with for some time. The examine which of the following three strategies you might apply now to eliminate the difficulty: Adapt – change your attitude in dealing with the situation. Shape – reshape your existing environment to better deal with the situation. Select – choose a new environment and change/move. Each day of the exercise, work to implement your change strategy.
47. During the duration of this exercise, attend a public meeting in your local community, whether school board, city council, or public hearing, and participate in whatever way seems best. Each day spend a few minutes researching some issue of local public importance.
48. During the duration of this exercise, take an inventory of all the goods and services that you consume each day to see which are produced locally and which are produced from distant sources. Each day find some specific ways to replace those produced from distant sources with goods and services produced locally.
49. During the duration of this exercise, make a list of everything that is important to you – as long a list as you like – then identify from the list three things you could not live without, by crossing off the list all but three things you could not eliminate. Each day use these three things as your compass in choosing your daily activities and in decision-making.
50. During the duration of this exercise, before any purchase or acquisition ask: “How will this contribute to my long-term happiness?” and “What affect will this have on my family and friends and others around me?” and “What affect will this have on the environment?” Before any purchase, analyze the desire behind it to see what category it falls into: natural and necessary; natural but unnecessary; or unnatural and unnecessary. Work to minimize the natural but unnecessary and to eliminate the unnatural and unnecessary. List each of your possessions and ask of each if you could live without it. Attempt to live on just half of what you currently spend. Live on a budget and keep track of your expenses.
51. During the duration of this exercise, take time each day of this exercise to ask yourself: “Am I pursuing any unhappy courses of action?” If so, stop it. Identify three to five things you could do, or stop doing, or three to five possessions you could do without, that would simplify your life. For each item ask if it is required for you to live a happy life? Would doing it or not doing it, owning or possessing it, or not owning or possessing it, not only deprive you of happiness, but also cause you real pain and suffering? What pain or suffering would it cause? How would it contribute to your own wellbeing if you did it, didn’t do it, or did or didn’t possess it? Identify which thing or item you could easily eliminate and have a simpler and better life. Decide today to eliminate this activity or item from your life.
52. During the duration of this exercise, keep track of everything you eat. Do some physical activity for 30 minutes each day. Each day take time to clear away the physical clutter from your living and work space and keep it clear.
53. During the duration of this exercise, make plans to plant a garden with produce you like and could eat. Research each day what would grow best in your neighborhood and where you could plant a garden if you have no space in an attached yard. If possible, go ahead and plant it.
54. During the duration of this exercise, each day meditate on death & other bad things that could happen to you – not to focus on bad things but on your beneficial response to bad things occurring in your life, which they will! Envision everything that could go wrong and imagine your response if they did. (This is sometimes called defensive pessimism)
55. During the duration of this exercise, write a short story that is semi-autobiographical.
56. During the duration of this exercise, read at least one book from cover to cover.
57. During the duration of this exercise, write a handwritten letter to a family member or friend each day of the exercise, or work each day on one such letter.
58. During the duration of this exercise, have a senior citizen over for dinner at least once and ask them about their life. Each day go out of your way to pay particular attention to the wisdom of wise elders.
59. During the duration of this exercise, study the lives of virtuous people by reading their biographies and autobiographies. Write down the traits they possess that you’d like to emulate and each day do so.
60. During the duration of this exercise, paint or draw a picture, compose a short poem (don’t worry if it doesn’t rhyme), or write a short story.
61. During the duration of this exercise, write one haiku each day. See <https://www.creative-writing-now.com/how-to-write-a-haiku.html> -- for how to instructions.
62. During the duration of this exercise, spend time each day researching your ancestors – find their dates of birth, marriage, death, where they lived, where they worked, etc. If possible see if they have written down life histories, if so read them.
63. During the duration of this exercise, write or begin your own life history.
64. During the duration of this exercise, go to a local cemetery and walk around reading the headstones. Each day hold an imaginary conversation with your future self who is hours away from death about some problem you are currently facing. What advice do you suppose your future self would give you? Write it down.
65. During the duration of this exercise, write your own obituary. Spend no more than 15 minutes each day writing and editing it. Then compose the talk you’d deliver at your own funeral. This should include what you consider to be the most important things you’d want your family and friends to remember and never forget.
66. During the duration of this exercise, take on the practice of not killing for your own convenience—not taking the life of another being whether food animal, insect, or some other living thing.
67. During the duration of this exercise, keep a detailed log of how you spend your time. Be precise in writing down what activities you engage in during each hour of the day from waking until sleeping.
68. During the duration of this exercise, when you first wake up plan something that day that you will look forward to doing.
69. During the duration of this exercise, schedule at least two hours every day to spend with family or friends doing something enjoyable.
70. During the duration of this exercise, if something unfortunate or “bad” happens to you, if you experience some deep loss, then plan and hold a one-day pity party for yourself and then get over it!
71. During the duration of this exercise, if at any time you feel tired, unmotivated, fearful, anxious, or just in an overall negative mood, just tell yourself that for the next 15 minutes you are going to act as if you were a person of graceful presence. Then act for the next 15 minutes as if you were a person of calm self-confidence, emotional resilience, cheerfulness, and with a loving and infectious enthusiasm for life.
72. During the duration of this exercise, take a few minutes each day to de-clutter your living and workspace. Get rid of everything you don’t use or don’t need, but that just gets in the way. Keep your living and workspace clean and uncluttered the entire week.
73. During the duration of this exercise, find a quiet place and spend 5 minutes of silence, no screens, music, talk, etc. Turn everything off and practice stillness!
74. During the duration of this exercise, each day spend 5 minutes listening to bird sounds.
75. During the duration of this exercise, choose an inspirational book and each day spend time pondering, meditating, and reflecting over passages from the book.
76. During the duration of this exercise, spend time outside each day doing a different activity: take hike in the mountains, spend at least one-half observing a flower, an insect, or an animal and notice every particular detail you can, spend at least one-half hour looking up at the sky and observing the movement of the clouds, or just the sky itself, just sit on the ground and feel your connection to the earth, walk around your neighborhood noticing things you haven’t seen before, and choose two to repeat.
77. During the duration of this exercise, each day teach another person one of the concepts you’ve been learning doing these exercises.
78. During the duration of this exercise, practice fasting – going without food and water or just food for 24 or 48 hours, or choose another length of time that works for you. Or whenever you’re hungry, wait 30 minutes before eating.
79. During the duration of this exercise, set one reachable weekly goal and plan each day what small thing you need to do to achieve your week’s goal.
80. During the duration of this exercise, each day tell someone who has inspired you how they made a difference in your life and thank them for it.
81. During the duration of this exercise, go to bed and get up each morning at the same time. When you wake up, get out of bed! Don’t lie in bed worrying about the day ahead, but get up and do something.
82. During the duration of this exercise, stay off of social media.
83. During the duration of this exercise, after any significant event happens, express gratitude and find the best new opportunity this event opens up for you.
84. During the duration of this exercise, at the end of each day ask yourself the following questions:

* Who did I compare myself with today and how did it make me feel?
* How did I treat people today and how did it make me feel?
* Do I have confidence that I can become the person I want to be? Why or why not?

1. During the duration of this exercise, do not say anything about another person you would not say if they were present.
2. During the duration of this exercise, when you are with another person don’t check or look at or take out your phone. Be fully present to the human being you are with face-to-face.
3. During the duration of this exercise, create a meal plan around what you already have in your pantry and fridge. Eat your leftovers—take them for lunch the next day.
4. During the duration of this exercise, carry all your trash around with you in a bag to see how much waste you create.
5. During the duration of this exercise, live each day as if it were your last. Be present to people and events as if this were the last time you’d be with them or experience the event.
6. During the duration of this exercise, cut down on sugar, eat more fruits and veggies, cut out one visit to fast food this week, eliminate one thing from your diet that you know is unhealthy.
7. During the duration of this exercise, imagine a conversation with your deathbed self. What worries would you share with him or her? What advice do you imagine they’d give you?
8. During the duration of this exercise, become the change you seek in the world. What is the one change you’d like to see in the world to make it a better place? Then exemplify that change yourself in how you choose to live each day of the exercise.
9. Create your own character exercise. What is it?