

EXPAND YOUR HORIZON

Change your perspective toward your body, with three simple exercises backed up by science.

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ABOUT

Expand Your Horizon was developed by Dr. Jessica Alleva and her colleagues at Maastricht University in the Netherlands (Alleva et al., 2015) and has been tested in multiple scientific studies. Based on a recent review of the science, it is the most effective approach for enhancing positive body image (Guest et al., 2019).

In a nutshell, Expand Your Horizon works by helping people to expand their focus on their body, from an appearance-based focus (i.e., how does my body look?) to a functionality-based focus (i.e., what can my body do?).

It helps people to not only bring their body functionality into focus, but also to reflect on why those functions are valuable to them (i.e., why do I appreciate my body?). For more details on the scientific background of the programme, including references to relevant literature, please visit: <https://jessicaalleva.wixsite.com/expand-your-horizon>

Expand Your Horizon consists of a brief introduction, followed by three writing exercises. The writing exercises were designed to be completed across one week, but you can complete them at your own pace.

We have also included a brief one-session version of Expand Your Horizon at the end of this document. While we recommend completing all three writing exercises, we recognise that having a one-session writing exercise can be helpful for some individuals, too.

For any comments or questions, do not hesitate to contact Dr. Jessica Alleva at jessica.alleva@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

INTRODUCTION

When we think about our body, we usually think about the **appearance** of our body (e.g., weight, size, shape). In addition, we may often be negative about the appearance of our body (e.g., “I wish I were more attractive”).

In the coming exercises, however, you are going to practice looking at your body in a different, more positive way. Instead of focusing on the appearance of your body, you are going to practice focusing on **all of the things that your body can do**. We call this aspect of the body **functionality**.

Before continuing, take a few minutes to contemplate the things that your body can do. What kinds of things come to mind?

Below is a list of body functions that other people have come up with. Take a moment to read through them. Some of these functions may have already been on your mind, but you may not have thought of the other ones yet.

Body Functions Related to Senses and Sensations

Seeing
Tasting
Touching
Hearing
Smelling
Experiencing pleasure
Feeling emotions

Body Functions Related to Physical Capacities

Running
Jumping
Walking
Stretching
Flexibility
Physical coordination
Agility
Balance
Strength
Stamina
Energy level
Reflexes
Sports
Yoga
Cycling

Body Functions Related to Internal Processes

Healing from a cold
Digesting food
Absorbing vitamins
Creating a baby
Healing from a wound
Growing (hair, nails, new skin cells, etc.)
Regulating temperature, hunger, thirst, etc.
General restoration (e.g., during sleep)
Removing toxins from the body (e.g., through the liver)
Breathing

Body Functions Related to Creative Endeavours

Dancing
Painting
Drawing
Building
Sculpting
Carving
Writing
Singing
Playing an instrument
Reading
Photography
Gardening

Body Functions Related to Self-Care

Sleeping/resting
Eating

Drinking

Cooking

Caring for the body (e.g., by showering or taking a bath)

Body Functions Related to Relationships with Others and Communication

Talking

Body language

Facial expressions

Hugging

Cuddling

Kissing

Crying

Shaking hands

Making eye contact

Being a shoulder to cry on

Giving (or receiving) a massage

Writing a letter

Before moving on, take a moment to contemplate the **importance** of some of these body functions to your life. What do these functions mean to you? Why are they valuable to you?

For example, how dull would life be if you couldn't taste your favourite foods? To take another example, where would you be if you couldn't communicate to others using your body (e.g., to give hugs, hold hands)? Or, what if you couldn't use your body for creative expression (e.g., for painting, dancing)?

Body functions can be seemingly simple (e.g., stretching), or complex (e.g., healing from a cold), but all of them are important for us to lead our lives and many of them make life fulfilling.

Note: As you think about body functionality, keep in mind that every body is unique. What is important is not necessarily "what" our body can do (and whether it can do those things "well"), but developing an **appreciation** for what our unique body can do.

At first, it is very difficult for many people to think of the different things that their body can do, because they are so used to thinking of their body in terms of appearance. You may also find it challenging to think about your body in terms of functionality. But, with practice, it will become easier and more natural to you. Completing the Expand Your Horizon writing exercises will help you to accomplish this.

Now, let's get started with your first writing exercise.

WRITING EXERCISE 1

At the start, you were asked to think of some of the things that your body can do. Now, in this writing exercise, you are going to **describe in more detail what your body can do**.

In your writing, take your time, really let go and explore the many different things that your body can **do**. Specifically, in this first writing exercise you will focus *only* on body functions that are related to (1) **the body's senses and sensations** (e.g., seeing, hearing) and (2) **physical activity and movement** (e.g., going for a walk, dancing). You will focus on the other types of body functions in your second and third writing exercises. If you need inspiration, you can always refer back to the list of body functions.

When you are writing about your body's functions, it is important that you **reflect on what these functions mean to you**. Ask yourself, "Why are these functions important to me?" Remember that, even though we don't often stop to contemplate the functionality of our body, each simple and complex function plays an important role in our lives.

There are 3 "rules" for this writing exercise:

- (1) Write for at least 15 minutes (you can write for longer, if you like);
- (2) Once you have started writing, do not stop until at least 15 minutes have passed;
- (3) After you have finished the writing exercise, please reread what you have written.

Don't worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. Keep in mind that different bodies can do different things. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers. Your writing will be unique depending on **your own body**.

Now, go ahead and get started!

WRITING EXERCISE 2

You recently completed your first writing exercise, wherein you described the functionality of your body and why it is important to you. Specifically, you focused on body functions that are related to the body's senses and sensations, and physical capacities.

In your second writing exercise, you will focus *only* on body functions that are related to (1) **internal processes** (e.g., healing, digesting) and (2) **creative endeavours** (e.g., drawing, writing). Please take your time, really let go, and explore the functions that are related to these areas of body functionality. If you need inspiration, you can always refer back to the list of body functions.

As in your first writing exercise, it is important that you **reflect on what these different functions mean to you**. Ask yourself, "Why are these functions important to me?" Each simple and complex body function plays an important role in our lives.

As a reminder, these are the "rules" for this writing exercise:

- (1) Write for at least 15 minutes (you can write for longer, if you like);
- (2) Once you have started writing, do not stop until at least 15 minutes have passed;
- (3) After you have finished the writing exercise, please reread what you have written.

Remember that you do not need to worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. Your writing will be unique depending on **your own body**. There are no right or wrong answers.

WRITING EXERCISE 3

By now you have completed two writing exercises about the functionality of your body and why it is important to you. In these writing exercises, you focused on body functions that are related to (1) the body's senses and sensations, (2) physical capacities, (3) internal processes, and (4) creative endeavours.

In your final writing exercise, you will focus *only* on body functions that are related to (1) **self-care** (e.g., eating, sleeping) and (2) **communication and your body's relationship with other people** (e.g., hugging, holding hands). Once again, take your time, really let go, and explore the body functions that are related to these areas of body functionality. As always, you may refer back to the list of body functions if you need inspiration.

When you are writing about your body's functions, remember to **reflect on what these functions mean to you**, and to ask yourself "Why are these functions important to me?" Each simple and complex function plays an important role in our lives.

These are the "rules" for the writing exercise:

- (1) Write for at least 15 minutes (you can write for longer, if you like);
- (2) Once you have started writing, do not stop until at least 15 minutes have passed;
- (3) After you have finished the writing exercise, please reread what you have written.

Remember that you do not need to worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. **Your body is unique**, so your writing will be unique, too. There are no right or wrong answers.

Now, go ahead and get started!

EXPAND YOUR HORIZON

One-session version

INTRODUCTION

Your body is capable of many different and valuable **functions**. Think, for example, about your body's ability to breathe, taste, hug, or heal from a cold.

In this writing exercise, you are going to focus on, and write about, the many things that your body is able to **do**. This aspect of your body is called **functionality**.

Below is a list of some of your body's possible functions. Please read through these functions now. As you think about body functionality, keep in mind that every body is unique. What is important is not necessarily "what" your body can do (and whether it can do those things "well"), but developing an **appreciation** for what your unique body can do.

Body Functions Related to Senses and Sensations

Seeing

Tasting

Touching

Hearing

Smelling

Experiencing pleasure

Feeling emotions

Body Functions Related to Physical Capacities

Running

Jumping

Walking

Stretching

Flexibility
Physical coordination
Agility
Balance
Strength
Stamina
Energy level
Reflexes
Sports
Yoga
Cycling

Body Functions Related to Internal Processes

Healing from a cold
Digesting food
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Drawing
Building

Sculpting
Carving
Writing
Singing
Playing an instrument
Reading
Photography
Gardening

Body Functions Related to Self-Care

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Eating
Drinking
Cooking
Caring for the body (e.g., by showering or taking a bath)

Body Functions Related to Relationships with Others and Communication

Talking
Body language
Facial expressions
Hugging
Cuddling
Kissing
Crying
Shaking hands
Making eye contact
Being a shoulder to cry on
Giving (or receiving) a massage
Writing a letter

INSTRUCTIONS

Now, in the space below, you are going to **write about the functions of your unique body**. Take your time, really let go and explore the many different things that your body can do. You may focus on as many body functions as you like. You may also refer to the list of body functions for inspiration.

When you are writing about your body's functions, please **reflect on what these functions mean to you**. Ask yourself, "Why are these functions important and valuable to me?"

Keep in mind that your writing will be unique depending on **your own body**. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers.

We recommend that you spend at least **15 minutes** on this writing exercise. Once you have finished writing, it can be insightful to reread what you have written.

You can complete this writing exercise as often as you like, as it can help you to create and maintain a more positive and functionality-focused perspective toward your body.

Now, go ahead and get started!



