

## Joy in the Modern World

For this argumentative essay, you'll explore the idea of joy—and its cousins—awe and happiness. Across the sciences and humanities, researchers have investigated the mental, physical, and social effects of joy—from its role in building resilience to its impact on community life. Yet the concept of joy is not simple: it can be fleeting or sustained, individual or collective, spontaneous or cultivated.

### Prompt

**Write a 500-750 word argument-based essay exploring how joy influences individual well-being and contributes to society more broadly.**

This prompt asks you to analyze what makes joy meaningful, powerful, or even necessary in human life. It also asks you to wonder how joy remains possible in the face of modern challenges ranging from (but not limited to) tech driven isolation, increasing political polarity, and climate events. Your thesis should clearly state your position on the question: what is the role of joy to individual and social health; is it essential or a luxury in a difficult world? Then, craft an argument that draws on evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support your claims. Your essay should first describe what the sources reveal about the causes and effects of joy and then develop your own argument about how individuals and societies might foster it.

Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from—whether by direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary—using the authors' last names in parentheses.

The sources provided are not the only type of evidence you can use. **Reflect on your own experience and observations of joy—moments that have shaped your understanding of its value or its limits.** Being able to connect your argument to lived experience can make your essay more compelling.

Sources (You can find linked pdf files of these on the contest website)

**Source A: “Buy Happiness—by Giving Your Money Away” (Wall Street Journal, Nov. 2024)**  
<https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/how-to-donate-improve-mood-health-68b1455d>

**Source B: “Awe, Wonder, and the Human Mind” (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Oct. 2021)**  
<https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/nyas.14588>

**Source C: “7 Simple Ways to Be a Bit Happier Each Day” (Washington Post, July 2025)**  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2025/07/22/joy-strategies-health-wellbeing>

**Source D: “You Can Feel Joy Even When the World Seems Bleak” (Wall Street Journal, Mar. 2022)**

<https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/you-can-feel-joy-even-when-the-world-seems-bleakbut-you-have-to-try-harder-11647650585>

**Source E: “Why Money Doesn’t Buy Happiness in America.” (Plain English Podcast, Oct. 2025)**

[www.theringer.com/podcasts/plain-english-with-derek-thompson/2025/10/07/why-money-doesn't-buy-happiness-in-america](http://www.theringer.com/podcasts/plain-english-with-derek-thompson/2025/10/07/why-money-doesn't-buy-happiness-in-america)