




Writing Your 80th Birthday Party Speech: A Values Clarification Exercise

ACT

 Exercise

 45 min or more

 Client or group

 No

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) emphasizes the importance of living in alignment with one's values to cultivate psychological flexibility, well-being, and purposeful action [1]. Central to ACT is the idea that values act as a compass, guiding us to live meaningful lives even amidst pain and adversity [2]. When clients clarify their values, they gain insight into what truly matters, which can bolster motivation, direction, and resilience.

One powerful method for clarifying values is through future-oriented visualization, such as imagining one's 80th birthday party. This method echoes the narrative exercises used in ACT, that encourage clients to step out of momentary thoughts and feelings to reflect on longer-term meaning and legacy. Visualization taps into experiential learning and can elicit rich emotional and cognitive insights [3, 4].

Studies have shown that ACT interventions that focus on values improve mental health outcomes across diverse client groups, including university students, those with problematic substance use, caregivers, and parents [4, 5, 6]. A central mechanism behind these benefits is clarifying personal values and using them as a guide to committed action, which fosters a flexible, purpose-driven response to life's challenges [7].

When doing values clarification exercises, clients may recognize they have been living life in terms of values that are not their own but passed on to them by parents, education, the workplace, and society more generally. Recognizing that life has been lived on others' terms and not their own can trigger intense emotions and even a grieving process [1, 2]. While this exercise might look simple, clients should be prepared for an intense emotional impact.

This exercise helps clients connect with their authentic values by asking them to imagine delivering a heartfelt speech on their 80th birthday. By envisioning how they would like to be remembered, clients uncover personal themes of meaning, virtue, and impact that clarify what they most want to stand for.



Author

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Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients clarify their core personal values by visualizing and writing the speech they would give at their 80th birthday party that celebrates a life well lived. By doing so, clients can reflect on what matters most to them, decide what they want to stand for, and identify the values that they want to guide their present and future behavior.



Advice

- This exercise can be introduced in a one-to-one session with a client then given as a homework exercise using the worksheet attached. You can also offer the exercise in a workshop using one worksheet per person, with a group sharing at the reflection stage (see *step 6*).
- To get the most out of this exercise, clients should approach it with openness, imagination, and self-compassion. It's not about crafting a perfect or impressive speech, it's about uncovering what truly matters at the deepest level. Practitioners should encourage clients to let go of internal judgments and focus on authenticity.
- Clients may find it emotionally moving to reflect on their life from this future perspective. Some may even experience sadness or regret as they identify discrepancies between their current life and their ideal values. This discomfort can be a valuable cue, indicating areas where meaningful change is possible.
- Practitioners are advised to process any strong emotional responses with clients and explore how identified values might inform actionable steps. As Hayes [1] emphasizes, moving toward what matters often involves embracing discomfort in service of a richer life.



References

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6. Alam, A., & Mohanty, A. (2023). "Happiness engineering": Acceptance and commitment therapy for university students' classroom engagement, mental health, and psychological flexibility. In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sustainable Development* (pp. 45-49). CRC Press.
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Introduction

Imagine you are celebrating your 80th birthday. You are surrounded by friends, family, and people who have been part of your life journey. It's time for you to give a speech that's a reflection on your life, who you have been, what you stood for, and what truly mattered.

This exercise will help you explore your values by writing that speech. Don't focus on how old you'll be or what you'll look like, focus instead on what you'd be proud to say you lived for.

Step 1: Set the scene

Find a quiet space and close your eyes. Picture yourself at your 80th birthday celebration. Where is it? Who is there? What kind of atmosphere surrounds you?

Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to step fully into this future moment.

Step 2: Reflect on key life domains

Jot down thoughts about these questions:

- What kind of relationships did you build?
- How did you contribute to others?
- What challenges did you face with courage?
- What principles did you uphold even when it was hard?

Step 3: Identify core themes

Review your notes and highlight recurring words, values, or themes. These might be things like "kindness," "resilience," "truth," "creativity," or "service."

Take a look at the worksheet (Appendix) and circle 3–5 values that stand out to you, or add your own.



Step 4: Write your speech

Now, write your 80th birthday speech. Speak as if you're truly delivering it. Begin with:

"Thank you all for being here today..."

Write about the kind of life you lived, what you stood for, what you're proud of, and what mattered most. For example:

"Thank you all for being here today. Turning 80 feels a bit surreal to be honest, but looking back, I see a life full of meaning. I've had my share of joys, challenges, mistakes, and second chances. I've worked hard, loved deeply, laughed often, and learned a little humility along the way. What matters most, I've found, are the people you walk with, and I've been blessed with an entertaining bunch of family and friends. You've all kept life interesting! If I've done anything right, it's trying my best to be real and honest with others, seeing the funny side, and always being grateful. Here's to the past with fondness, to the present with joy, and to the future with curiosity- who knows what's around the corner?"

Step 5: Extract your values

Read your speech out loud to yourself. Then, answer:

- What do I want my life to stand for? *For example: a love of learning.*
- What values guided my imagined life? *For example: curiosity.*
- Which of these can I start living more fully today? *For example: planning a new experience or taking a new class.*

List 3–5 core values you want to prioritize.

Step 6: Commit to action

Choose one of your core values. Write one small action you can take this week to live more in line with it. Living in line with your personal values enhances a sense of purpose and meaning, builds resilience, and makes life more fulfilling.

For example:

- **Value:** Compassion
- **Action:** Call a friend who's going through a hard time and offer support.



Step 7: Reflection

Finally after completing the exercise, reflect on your experience with the following questions:

- What did I discover about what I want my life to stand for?
- What can I do to live a more values-based life?
- Are there any of my most important values that remain only partly fulfilled at the moment?
- If so, what action can I take to embrace any of my values that remain unfulfilled?

**Appendix:** Values worksheet

Select 3-5 of these values that represent what you'd like to be celebrated for, or choose your own. The list of values is endless and this is just a prompt sheet.

Honesty: speaking and acting truthfully	Responsibility: being accountable for your actions
Fairness: treating others justly and equally	Humility: perspective on your own importance
Integrity: being real and authentic	Compassion: caring about others' suffering
Kindness: acting with generosity and care	Gratitude: appreciating what you have
Empathy: sensitivity to others' feelings	Forgiveness: letting go of resentment
Perseverance: persisting despite difficulty	Courage: acting in spite of fear
Curiosity: being open to new experiences	Zest: approaching life with excitement and energy
Purpose: driven by a sense of meaning	Spirituality: connecting to the sacred/transcendent
Hope: believing in positive outcomes	Meaning: seeking significance in experiences
Love: valuing deep, close relationships	Loyalty: being faithful to people and commitments
Citizenship: serving the community	Justice: advocating for fairness in society
Self-discipline: regulation of impulses	Independence: making your own choices
Achievement: attainment of objectives	Creativity: expressing originality and imagination