

THE MEANING IN LIFE QUESTIONNAIRE (MLQ)

© Michael F. Steger 2010

WHAT DOES THE QUESTIONNAIRE MEASURES?

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire assesses two dimensions of meaning in life using 10 items rated on a seven-point scale from “Absolutely True” to “Absolutely Untrue.” The Presence of Meaning subscale measures the how full respondents feel their lives are of meaning. The Search for Meaning subscale measures how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives.

The MLQ has excellent reliability, test-retest stability, stable factor structure, and convergence among informants. Presence of Meaning is positively related to well-being, intrinsic religiosity, extraversion and agreeableness, and negatively related to anxiety and depression. Search for Meaning is positively related to religious quest, rumination, past-negative and present-fatalistic time perspectives, negative affect, depression, and neuroticism, and negatively related to future time perspective, close-mindedness (dogmatism), and well-being. Presence relates as expected with personal growth self-appraisals, and altruistic and spiritual behaviors as assessed through daily diaries.

The MLQ does not have cut scores like measures of psychological disorders might have. It is intended to measure meaning in life across the complete range of human functioning.

The MLQ takes about 3-5 minutes to complete.

KEY REFERENCES:

*Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53, 80-93.

Steger, M. F., & Kashdan, T. B. (2007). Stability and specificity of meaning in life and life satisfaction over one year. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8, 161-179.

Steger, M. F., Kawabata, Y., Shimai, S., & Otake, K. (2008). The meaningful life in Japan and the United States: Levels and correlates of meaning in life. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 660-678.

Steger, M. F., Kashdan, T. B., Sullivan, B. A., & Lorentz, D. (2008). Understanding the search for meaning in life: Personality, cognitive style, and the dynamic between seeking and experiencing meaning. *Journal of Personality*, 76, 199-228.

Steger, M. F., & Shin, J. Y. (in press). The relevance of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire to therapeutic practice: A look at the initial evidence. *International Forum on Logotherapy*.

E-MAIL CONTACT INFORMATION:

michael_f_steger@yahoo.com

WHAT DO THE SCORES MEAN?

Based on a number of studies, we can make some probabilistic guesses about other areas of your life based on your scores on the MLQ. Please keep in mind that these are really only guesses and should not in any way be considered diagnostic. These guess are also a lot more likely to be accurate if you are from cultures similar to the United States.

- If you scored *above* 24 on Presence and also *above* 24 on Search, **you feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, yet you are still openly exploring that meaning or purpose. Life's meaning is an ever-unfolding and ever-deepening process for you. You are more drawn to the question, "what can my life mean?" than to any single answer.** You are likely satisfied with your life, generally optimistic, experience feelings of love frequently, and rarely feel depressed or anxious. You may be somewhat active in religious activities, but regardless of your involvement in religion, you are likely to feel that your spirituality is important to you. You place less value on pursuing simple sensory stimulation and pleasure than other people. You are generally certain of, and occasionally forceful regarding, your views and beliefs. Although you could be said to prefer having a stable structure in society and life, you see many areas for improvement to the current situation. People who know you would probably describe you as conscientious, thoughtful, easy to get along with, open to new experiences, and generally easy-going and emotionally stable.
- If you scored *above* 24 on Presence and *below* 24 on Search, **you feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, and are not actively exploring that meaning or seeking meaning in your life. One might say that you are satisfied that you've grasped what makes your life meaningful, why you're here, and what you want to do with your life.** You are probably highly satisfied with your life, optimistic, and have a healthy self-esteem. You frequently experience feelings of love and joy, and rarely feel afraid, angry, ashamed, or sad. You probably hold traditional values. You are usually certain of, and often forceful regarding, your views and likely support structure and rules for society and living. You are probably active in and committed to religious pursuits. People who know you would probably describe you as conscientious, organized, friendly, easy to get along with, and socially outgoing.
- If you scored *below* 24 on Presence and also *above* 24 on Search, **you probably do not feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, and you are actively searching for something or someone that will give your life meaning or purpose. You may feel lost in life, and this idea may cause you distress.** You are probably not always satisfied with your life. You may not experience emotions like love and joy that often. You may occasionally, or even often, feel anxious, nervous, or sad and depressed. You are probably questioning the role of religion in your life, and may be working hard to figure out whether there is a God, what life on Earth is really about, and which, if any, religion is right for you. People who know you would probably describe you as liking to play things by ear, or "go with the flow" when it comes to plans. They might find you to be worried on occasion, and not particularly socially active.
- If you scored *below* 24 on Presence and also *below* 24 on Search, **you probably do not feel your life has a valued meaning and purpose, and are not actively exploring that meaning or seeking meaning in your life. Overall, you probably don't find the idea of thinking about your life's meaning very interesting or important.** You may not always be satisfied with your life, or yourself, and you might not be particularly optimistic about the future. You may not experience emotions like love and joy that often. You may occasionally, or even often, feel anxious, nervous, or sad and depressed. You are probably do not hold traditional values, and may be more likely to value stimulating, exciting experiences, although you are not necessarily open-minded about everything. When you have big decisions to make, you may be prefer to identify the right answer based on your confidence that 'you'll know it when you see it.' People who know you would probably describe you as sometimes disorganized, occasionally nervous or tense, and not particularly socially active or especially warm towards everyone.

THE MEANING IN LIFE QUESTIONNAIRE, ITEMS AND SCORING

MLQ Please take a moment to think about what makes your life and existence feel important and significant to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

Absolutely Untrue	Mostly Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Can't Say True or False	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Absolutely True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. _____ I understand my life's meaning.
2. _____ I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
3. _____ I am always looking to find my life's purpose.
4. _____ My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. _____ I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. _____ I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. _____ I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. _____ I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. _____ My life has no clear purpose.
10. _____ I am searching for meaning in my life.

To Score:

Presence subscale score = subtract the rating for item #9 from 8, then add to the ratings for items 1, 4, 5, and 6. Scores range between 5 and 35.

Search subscale score = add together the ratings for items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. Scores range between 5 and 35.

More information can be obtained from: <http://michaelfsteger.com>

© Michael F. Steger 2010