

- 1. Mark your confusion.**
- 2. Show evidence of a close reading.**
- 3. Write a 1+ page reflection.**

10 Questions to Ask Yourself at the Start of a New Year

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The last of 2024 is in the rearview mirror. But before forgetting it ever existed, consider reflecting on everything good and bad and weird and inspiring that happened to you over the past 12 months.

“When we stop and stand and look back at where we’ve been, and how we felt when we were there, it can serve as a blueprint for where we want to go forward,” says Caroline Fenkel, chief clinical officer with the virtual mental-health platform Charlie Health. By asking yourself a series of probing questions, you’ll become more self-aware and figure out how to make changes that can boost your happiness and well-being in the New Year. Think of it as a “gentle inventory, rather than a high-stakes self-assessment,” she adds.

Where to start? Ask yourself who and what strengthens or drains you. These insights can help you better manage your energy. Fenkel likes to regularly take inventory of what's adding a net positive to her life, for example—like taking care of the ducks in her pond—and what registers as a net negative, like spending too much time on social media. If something makes you particularly happy, “do it over and over and over again,” she says. (More duck-feeding for Fenkel in 2025.)

We asked experts to share what we ought to ask ourselves at the start of 2025 to make it our best year yet.

1. What brought me genuine joy last year? And what took it away?

Take a moment to reflect on what made you happiest over the past year—and don't overthink it. Whatever pops into your mind was a “peak experience,” says Lauren Farina, a psychotherapist in Chicago. “It reveals our truest, most authentic desires, beyond what we've been conditioned to believe we should be doing or what we’re expected to be doing.”

Once you’ve landed on your happiest moments, brainstorm practical ways to integrate more of those experiences into your day-to-day life in 2025. Maybe you took a trip to Sedona and were flooded with the kind of awe you haven't felt since you were a kid. You probably can't visit every weekend, but you could commit to other ways of spending more time in nature wherever you live, Farina suggests.

It’s equally important to reflect on what stole your energy or diminished your spirits over the past year. What kind of boundaries can you set to limit those stressful experiences? What can you let go of or delegate to someone else? “Our feelings are messengers, and it’s our job to decipher those,” Farina says—and to make smart changes accordingly.

2. Which relationships felt nourishing, and which depleted me?

Your relationships with other people are core to your happiness, Fenkel points out. Some feed you, while others zap all your energy. Take some time to figure out who falls into which category. Then, make it a point to prioritize the connections that energize you, while taking a step back from the ones that deplete you. “Detach with love,” she advises. “You have to protect yourself, and that's OK.”

That doesn’t necessarily mean cutting the draining person out of your life; rather, you might set boundaries around how much time you spend together or clearly communicate expectations for interactions.

3. How balanced did my time feel between work, family time, social commitments, and rest?

Looking back, you might realize you leaned too heavily into one of these areas at the expense of others. If work dominated your 2024, think through how you can protect more of your personal time; or, if you didn't show up professionally the way you hoped, brainstorm how you’ll shift into a new gear. “It's so tough to live a balanced life, but the only way you're going to have that balance is if you stop and reflect on it,” Fenkel says.

She suggests getting into the habit of doing this kind of check-in quarterly: “OK, here are the number of days I took off work last quarter and didn't check my Slack or my email at all.” Having that type of hard data on hand will help you carve out time for what's most important to you, she says.

4. What should I say no to? What would I like to say yes to?

If you need to get better acquainted with a certain two-letter word in 2025, start by examining the barriers that are keeping you from saying no. You might worry, for example, that you're going to let people down, that you won't be loved anymore, or that your friends will be mad at you, says Gabrielle Morse, a licensed mental health counselor in New York City. “Whether it’s physical discomfort or resentment, there are all sorts of things that come

up emotionally from putting our needs last,” she says. Eventually, your bitterness about prioritizing other people will bubble over, tarnishing your relationships and happiness.

On the other hand, maybe you need to say *yes* more, especially to things you feel like you have deprioritized because of other obligations. Lots of people stifle their own desires, like leaning into creative pursuits, to accommodate others, Morse points out. “This is an invitation to ask yourself what you want,” Morse says. “It could end up being meaningful and fulfilling.”

5. What positive qualities did I notice in myself in 2024?

When people reflect on their year, they often tick off accomplishments, like getting promoted at work. “They reduce themselves to this one thing, and they’re so much more than that,” says Morse. “What’s so much more important are the qualities they’re able to see in themselves.”

She suggests thinking about ways you’ve grown or shown strength and resilience—or been true to your authentic self. Maybe you made progress breaking old patterns, like people-pleasing, Morse points out, or set new boundaries with family. Perhaps you persevered through a challenging health diagnosis or another hardship that could have knocked you down. Celebrate those wins—they’ll help ensure the upcoming year is your best yet.

6. What am I most proud of and grateful for over the past year?

Most people are conditioned to focus on what’s going wrong. (Fires don’t put themselves out, after all.) Give yourself a break and instead reflect on something positive, Farina says, like what you’re particularly proud of or grateful for. “That can shift our perspective to filter in more of what goes right, and more of what brings us joy,” she says. “It’s a way of seeing our subconscious with a new belief system”—and that will serve you well throughout the New Year.

7. How can I make peace with last year’s problems?

This is one of Farina’s favorite ways to turn challenges into opportunities. “Problems or crises are invitations or opportunities to evolve,” she says. You might realize, for example, that in order to come to terms with your stressful job, you need to practice mindfulness; or, to improve your relationship with your mother-in-law, you’ll need to work on becoming a better communicator.

Maybe something life-altering happened to you in 2024, and you’ll need to adopt a new mindset or communication strategy in order to cope. “Within a crisis or loss or trauma is an opportunity for you to grow,” Farina says.

8. Are my goals specific and attainable?

Targeted goals can keep you on track, but vague ones can derail you. If you want to get in shape, for example, better to commit to working out for 30 minutes every morning than simply vowing to “exercise more” or burning yourself out with three-hour gym sessions.

“You want something that’s very specific and that you can actually do,” says Dr. Ashley Zucker, a psychiatrist with Kaiser Permanente Southern California. “It might seem like it’s not a high enough goal, but it’s a great place to start. You can always add to it later.”

Similarly, try not to overdo the number of goals you’re working on at any one time; one or two is ideal, Zucker says. Otherwise, there’s a good chance you’ll get overwhelmed and spend more time stressing than achieving.

9. Am I being kind to myself?

No matter how your year goes, you’re going to have bad days. Be honest: Do you extend yourself enough grace when you hit these road bumps? One of Zucker’s favorite questions to ask herself is: “What would I say if my daughter was in this situation?” “Play that out in your head,” she says, talking to yourself the way you would your loved one. And remember: “There’s always tomorrow, and there’s always later today. Give yourself those second, third, fourth, and fifth opportunities.”

10. What would I do in 2025 if I weren’t afraid?

Reflecting on what you would do if you weren’t consumed with worry can help expose the ways fear plays a role in your daily life. “It’s not that we should never make decisions out of fear,” Farina adds. “But we should at least pause before defaulting to a fear-based choice.” By considering the ways that being afraid is holding you back, you might take a leap of faith in 2025 that changes the course of your year for the better.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about these questions? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.