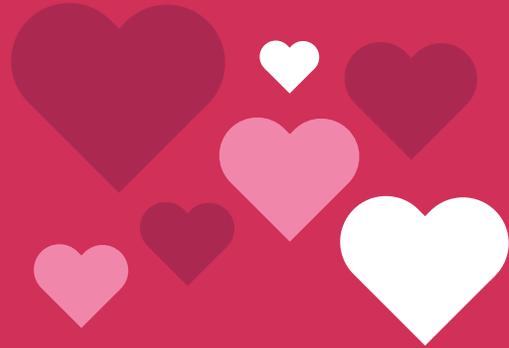


Gratitude

Appreciating what you've been given

♥ Strength of heart



“Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!”

-Lin Manuel Miranda, Hamilton: An American Musical

Why does gratitude matter?

When you feel gratitude, you feel a sense of abundance. When you express gratitude—especially when it’s heartfelt—you strengthen your relationships with others. Grateful people are happier and more fulfilled. And gratitude leads you to be nicer to other people: more cooperative, patient, and trusting.

Pulse Check

Think about how your day is going. How many of these things are true?

- I said “thank you” to someone
- I did something nice to show my appreciation.
- I can list lots of people and things that I’m lucky to have in my life
- I noticed when someone helped me
- I felt a sense of thankfulness for my good fortune

How do I encourage gratitude in others?

Model it. Talk about the good things that happen to you: *“I love this gorgeous spring day!”* Reframe difficulties by highlighting positive aspects: *“Work has been stressful lately, but I’m grateful that my boss trusts me with important responsibilities.”*

Celebrate it. Acknowledge when a child demonstrates gratitude: *“It makes me feel really great when you thank me for what I am doing.”* Display thank you notes you’ve received where others can see them. Post [Three Good Things](#) on social media.

Enable it. Keep stationery handy for writing thank you notes. At dinner, make it a habit to begin by sharing one good thing that happened that day. Establish a birthday ritual to write notes of appreciation.

Gratitude Letter



PAGE 1: Overview

PAGE 2: Activity

PAGE 3: Example

How long does it take?

10 minutes

How do I do it?

Write a letter to a person who has influenced your life in a positive way. This could be a teacher, relative, mentor, or coach. If you can, read your letter aloud to the person you chose.

How does it work?

Gratitude letters help you focus on the positive influence of another person in your life. This reminds you that someone cares about you, and that you matter. In addition, reading the letter to your chosen person can be a powerful experience for you and the recipient—more than you originally expected.

Consider the following:

- *What do you most remember them doing or saying?*
- *What is an important memory or experience from your time with them?*
- *How would your life be different if you hadn't met them?*
- *What character strengths do you most appreciate most about them?*
- *What makes them special and important in your life story?*

Inspired by: Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421.

Gratitude Letter

CharacterLAB

EXAMPLE



Dear Coach Brownfield,

I wanted to thank you for everything you've done for me this year. I've had a lot going on at home and my classes have been really challenging. But you have been so kind and understanding during all of my hardest moments.

← States impact on author

↘ Points to positive impact on others

I know you have a lot of kids who come to you and talk to you about issues they are facing because you are good at listening and helping them figure out what to do. And I know you have a lot to do as a coach and a teacher. But every time I came to talk to you or just needed a smile and a joke, you made the time for it. When I was in class and you could tell I was down, you checked on me before you went into helping me do the work.

↘ Specific memories

There have been some days this year when I didn't want to deal with anyone and didn't want to come to school at all. But I knew you would want me to try my hardest and get to class if I could. Knowing there was someone as kind as you at school made it easier to get on the bus on those days.

← Directly names how life changed for the better

Allen S.



Gratitude Journal

Character LAB



PAGE 1: Overview

PAGE 2: Journal Prompts

PAGE 3: Example

How long does it take?

10 minutes per entry

How do I do it?

Keep a journal where you write in detail about things you are grateful for in your life.

How does it work?

By default, our attention is drawn to problems and obstacles in life. This exercise helps you notice, in ways both big and small, what is going well.

Inspired by: Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.

“We are all more blind to what we have than to what we have not.”

-Audre Lorde

Gratitude Journal

Character LAB

Respond to one of the prompts below in a response of at least 5 - 6 sentences. Try to respond to a new prompt every day or every other day. Save this page and use it as a reference for new prompts.

Push yourself to elaborate and think deeply about why you are grateful for what you write about in each entry. Try to include all of the following in each response:

- A direct answer to the prompt
- Details about your response. Go for depth (writing more about one thing by including thoughts and feelings) instead of breadth (writing a little about lots of things)
- An explanation of why this person/experience/object makes you grateful. Push to go deep on “why?”

A. Think of a person in your life who you are grateful for. Why are you grateful for them?

B. Describe an event or experience that you didn't like when it was happening...but are grateful for now.

C. Write about a time when you worried something bad or upsetting would happen—but it didn't. What happened instead? How does that make you feel now?

D. We often take things for granted. What's something you might take for granted? How does it contribute to your life?

E. Think of someone who has helped you. They've also received help in their life. Who might have helped that person in their life and how?

F. Think of an activity you enjoy doing (e.g., a sport). How did you come to appreciate it?

G. What's something good that surprised you lately? What was surprising about it?

Gratitude Journal

CharacterLAB

EXAMPLE

9/12 Sometimes I take it for granted that I have really nice friends. My friends help me out and make me feel better every day by saying nice things. When I first switched schools last year, I was sometimes really lonely. And then I met my friends and it was so much better. But now that we've been friends so long and text all the time, it's easy to forget how boring it was to not have anyone to talk to! I am really glad I have nice friends at my school now who make me laugh all the time.

People you're grateful for

9/13 My soccer coach, Coach Behar, is really great and helps everyone on our team get better. He's always really positive and never gets angry, even when someone messes up in a game. I bet that when he was growing up he had a really good coach also who showed him how to get better at soccer and was also really nice like him. Coach Behar always says that it's important to be proud of how you played, more than whether you won the game. He might have had a coach who said the same thing which is why he believes it so much.

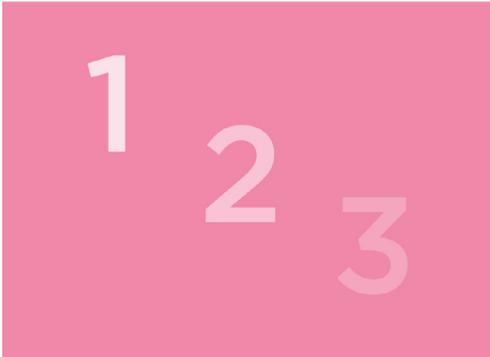
Someone who helped you

Help this person get earlier in their life

9/14 When I first realized that Ms. Marconi graded our work on our math problems in Algebra I, not just the answers, I was really annoyed. I didn't see why I was losing points on problems I got right! It didn't seem fair at all. But when the problems got harder later in the year, I realized sometimes I would mess up a problem I understood by not keeping my work neat and orderly. I needed to be more careful with each step, especially on things like systems of equations. Now I am glad that Ms. Marconi made me start paying attention to how I got to an answer, not just the answer.

Experience you didn't like at first but now appreciate

Three Good Things



PAGE 1: Overview

PAGE 2: Activity

PAGE 3: Example

How long does it take?

10 minutes

How do I do it?

In this daily reflection, you list three things that went well for you, and why they went well.

How does it work?

This brief exercise helps you reflect on the many things that happen every day. Over time, you begin to look for things in your day to add to your list!

Inspired by: Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421.

Three Good Things



At the end of each day, write down three things that went well for you and why they went well.

DATE	1	2	3

Three Good Things

Character LAB

EXAMPLE

DATE	1 <i>appreciating people you love and what they do for you</i>	2 <i>appreciating the kindness of strangers</i>	3 <i>something in the world you appreciate</i>
<i>Mon 6/16</i>	<i>I had breakfast with Mom. She wakes up early just to see me before I leave for school.</i>	<i>I almost left my backpack on the bus, and someone reminded me before I got off.</i>	<i>It was sunny yesterday. I really enjoyed walking home.</i>

Gratitude Endnotes

About these endnotes

This is where we provide references and in-depth information about everything in the Gratitude playbook.

Acknowledgements

We honor and thank the scientists whose research inspired this Playbook. In particular, we thank Giacomo Bono for his exceptionally helpful comments. Any errors or omissions are ours.

How we define this strength

Gratitude comes from the realization that you've received something positive and, in addition, that someone other than you was the cause (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Gratitude is among the most commonly endorsed character strengths. Across 54 different nations, gratitude was endorsed more strongly than 20 other strengths, superseded only by kindness, fairness and honesty (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006).

Some scientists argue that gratitude does not require recognizing a specific benefactor. For example, you might be grateful because you woke up this morning. Accordingly, gratitude is sometimes conceived as a tendency to notice and appreciate good things in the world (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Regardless, feeling grateful makes us want to be generous towards, and build relationships with, our perceived benefactors *as well as* other people (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008).

Look around, look around

See Miranda (2015). Lin Manuel Miranda is the American composer, playwright, and actor who created the record-breaking, precedent-setting Broadway hit *Hamilton*. Miranda has won Pulitzer, Tony, Grammy and Emmy awards. He is also a MacArthur Fellow.

Especially when it is heartfelt rather than a reflexive throw-away

How grateful we feel depends on how we interpret beneficial acts. Specifically, we feel more grateful to people when they do things we believe are valuable, provided at some sacrifice, and motivated by altruism (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

You strengthen your relationships with other people

Gratitude is important not only for maintaining relationships (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012; Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010) but also for building new, stronger and higher-quality relationships (Algoe, 2012; Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008).

Grateful people are happier and more fulfilled

A plethora of studies confirms the layman's intuition that the disposition to experience gratitude is associated with well-being, that is with life satisfaction, happiness or optimism (Davis et al., 2016; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Renshaw & Olinger Steeves, 2016; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010).

Nicer to other people

A meta-analysis of 91 studies shows a statistical significant association between gratitude and prosocial intentions and behaviors: grateful people are more likely to actively promote the wellbeing of others (Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017), even when helping is costly or the beneficiary is a stranger. (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Grant & Gino, 2010; Tsang, 2006).

How do I encourage gratitude in others?

For related ideas, see Froh, J. J., Bono, G., Fan, J., Emmons, R. A., Henderson, K., Harris, C., ... & Wood, A. M. (2014). Nice thinking! An educational intervention that teaches children to think gratefully. *School Psychology Review*, 43(2), 132-152. For more inspiration, see Froh and Bono (2014).

Gratitude Letter

Writing a Gratitude Letter increases well-being, and benefits are enhanced by reading the letter to the person you're thanking. (Kumar & Epley, 2018; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Toepfer, Cichy, & Peters, 2012; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). This applies to adolescents as well (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009).

We are all more blind

See Lorde and Clarke, 1984, p.31. Audre Lorde was an American writer, feminist, womanist and civil rights activist.

Three Good Things

Completing the *Three Good Things* activity for one week has been shown to increase happiness for at least six months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Compared to keeping a Gratitude Journal, listing three specific good things that happened during the day can help

prevent "gratitude fatigue," the paradoxical finding that writing about blessings every day seems to be less effective than writing about blessings only three times per week (Emmons, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Gratitude Journal

Evidence that writing about your blessings can increase psychological and physical well-being dates to a seminal investigation by Emmons and McCullough (2003). Compared to writing about hassles or either neutral events or social comparisons, writing about blessings heightened positive emotion, optimism about the future, and time spent exercising while reducing the number of self-reported health problems (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). These benefits have since been confirmed by other researchers (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). While the majority of research on gratitude has focused on adults, there is also evidence that when adolescents keep a gratitude journal, they become more academically engaged and, in addition, feel more grateful, optimistic, and satisfied with their lives (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008).

References

- Algoe, S. B. (2012). Find, remind, and bind: The functions of gratitude in everyday relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(6), 455-469.
- Algoe, S. B., Haidt, J., & Gable, S. L. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: Gratitude and relationships in everyday life. *Emotion*, 8(3), 425-429.
- Bartlett, M. Y., & DeSteno, D. (2006). Gratitude and prosocial behavior: Helping when it costs you. *Psychological science*, 17(4), 319-325.

Davis, D. E., Choe, E., Meyers, J., Wade, N., Varjas, K., Gifford, A., ... & Worthington Jr, E. L. (2016). Thankful for the little things: A meta-analysis of gratitude interventions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 63*(1), 20-31.

Emmons, R. A. (2013). *Gratitude works!: A 21-day program for creating emotional prosperity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(2), 377-389.

Froh, J. J., Emmons, R. A., Card, N. A., Bono, G., & Wilson, J. A. (2011). Gratitude and the reduced costs of materialism in adolescents. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*(2), 289-302.

Froh, J. J., Kashdan, T. B., Ozimkowski, K. M., & Miller, N. (2009). Who benefits the most from a gratitude intervention in children and adolescents? Examining positive affect as a moderator. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(5), 408-422.

Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(2), 213-233.

Gordon, A. M., Impett, E. A., Kogan, A., Oveis, C., & Keltner, D. (2012). To have and to hold: Gratitude promotes relationship maintenance in intimate bonds. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 103*(2), 257.

Grant, A. M., & Gino, F. (2010). A little thanks goes a long way: Explaining why gratitude expressions motivate prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*(6), 946-955.

Kumar, A., & Epley, N. (2018). Undervaluing gratitude: Expressers misunderstand the consequences of showing appreciation. *Psychological Science, 1*-13.

Lambert, N. M., Clark, M. S., Durtschi, J., Fincham, F. D., & Graham, S. M. (2010). Benefits of expressing gratitude: Expressing gratitude to a partner changes one's view of the relationship. *Psychological Science, 21*(4), 574-580.

Lorde, A., & Clarke, C. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. New York: Crossing Press.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 111-131.

Ma, L. K., Tunney, R. J., & Ferguson, E. (2017). Does gratitude enhance prosociality?: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 143*(6), 601-635.

McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. A. (2002). The grateful disposition: a conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*(1), 112-127.

Miranda, L. (2015). *On Hamilton: An american musical*. New York: Atlantic Records.

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2006). Character strengths in fifty-four nations and the fifty US states. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*(3), 118-129.

Renshaw, T. L., & Olinger Steeves, R. M. (2016). What good is gratitude in youth and schools? A systematic review and meta-analysis of correlates and intervention outcomes. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*(3), 286-305.

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*(5), 410-421.

Toepfer, S. M., Cichy, K., & Peters, P. (2012). Letters of gratitude: Further evidence for author benefits. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 13*, 187–201.

Tsang, J. A. (2006). Gratitude and prosocial behaviour: An experimental test of gratitude. *Cognition & Emotion, 20*(1), 138-148.

Watkins, P. C., Woodward, K., Stone, T., & Kolts, R. L. (2003). Gratitude and happiness: Development of a measure of gratitude, and relationships with subjective well-being. *Social Behavior and Personality, 31*, 431-451.

Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*(7), 890-905.

Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Stewart, N., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). A social-cognitive model of trait and state levels of gratitude. *Emotion, 8*(2), 281-290.