

Gratitude Journal

List up to five things you're grateful for today — then say why, and who was behind them.



15 min practice + 5 min journal

Standard practice

Handwritten journal, dated & timed

GGIA difficulty: Casual

1 Why you should try it

Student life is stressful, socially and academically. By orienting you toward positive experiences and good relationships, the Gratitude Journal can help counterbalance those difficulties. Research suggests that gratitude journaling can help students become more satisfied with their school experience — which, in turn, helps them see school as more enjoyable, interesting, and educational, an attitude that sets them up for success inside and outside the classroom.

Grateful or thankful is the feeling we get when something good happens to us. Many of us feel grateful for family, friends, or pets. Feeling grateful could also come from a time when someone helped you — a classmate who explained an assignment, a stranger who held a door. Gratitude is also personal and cultural: people express it through words, gestures, acts of kindness, rituals, or gifts. There is no single right way to feel it.

2 The session — Prof. Magee's 15-minute protocol

Follow these timings, not the website's. Set a timer. One session = the 15 minutes below, then 5 minutes of journaling immediately after. At least 4 sessions in your 2-week window — the original study ran daily for two weeks.

2'

5'

5'

3'

2

MIN

Settle

Sit, breathe, and think back over the past day. Ask yourself the plain question: *what am I grateful or thankful for today?*

5

MIN

List up to five

Write down up to five things in your life you feel grateful for right now. Mix scales: a person, a basic need met (food, a bed, a working phone), something someone did for you, something about your body or health, a place.

5

MIN

Go one layer deeper

For each item, add a sentence or two: *why* does this matter to you, and *who* (if anyone) is responsible for it? Naming the person is the part that shifts attention toward the kindness of others — the small acts you might otherwise miss.

3

MIN

Pick one and feel it

Choose the item that moves you most and dwell on it. Notice what gratitude feels like in the body. If it feels appropriate, decide whether you'll tell that person this week.

3 Then journal — 5 minutes, by hand

- Top of the entry: **date and time**. Entries without both lose credit.
- Write for **5 minutes without stopping** (about 300 words). Messy is fine; stopping is not.
- Before / during / after: how did you feel at each point? Be specific — body, mood, thoughts.
- What surprised you? What felt fake, awkward, or easier than expected?
- **Prompt:** Did the same people or things keep showing up? What does your list say about what actually holds your life together?
- **Prompt:** Was there a day when gratitude felt forced? What was going on, and what happened when you wrote anyway?

4 Evidence that it works

Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008)

In this study, students in grades 6–7 who completed Gratitude Journals daily for two weeks ended up being more satisfied with their school — even three weeks afterward — than students who didn't do any journaling. Compared to students who journaled about their hassles, they also felt less negative emotion, greater satisfaction with their home, and more optimism.

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003)

In the original adult studies, people who wrote weekly or daily about things they were grateful for reported more positive mood, more optimism about the coming week, and even more exercise and fewer physical complaints than people who wrote about hassles or neutral events.

5 Why it works

In order to keep a Gratitude Journal, you have to reflect on your days and remember the good parts. Over time, this practice teaches you to pay more attention to the kindness of others — small acts you might not have noticed otherwise — and it helps extend and expand feelings of thankfulness in response to those blessings. What's more, actually writing things down is key: research suggests translating thoughts into concrete language makes us more aware of them, deepening their emotional impact.

6 Know the research — for your presentation (APA 7)

In your presentation you will explain, **from memory and without notes**, the evidence behind each practice — who studied it, when, and what they found — plus something *not* written on the GGIA site or on this handout. Read these papers (SJNY library or Google Scholar), then follow their citations forward to find **your own article** — one more peer-reviewed study on this topic that is not the source study here (due Sun Dec 6). Take photos along the way; they are your slides.

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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.03.005>

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. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377>

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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760902992464>

Adapted for PSY 251 from Greater Good in Action, Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley — original at https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_journal_for_students. Practice sources: Jeffrey J. Froh, Ph.D., Hofstra University. Timings, session structure, and journal rules are Prof. Magee's and override the website's.