



GRATITUDE

SO MANY PEOPLE HAD A HAND
IN OUR SUCCESS, FROM THE
TEACHERS WHO INSPIRED US
TO THE JANITORS WHO KEPT
THE SCHOOL CLEAN.

MICHELLE OBAMA

MONTA VISTA CHARACTER LAB 2-3
THIS REVISION NOVEMBER 3, 2025
FIRST PRESENTED OCTOBER 15, 2024

GRATITUDE IS SURPRISINGLY HARD TO DEFINE OR CATEGORIZE! IS IT:

an emotion

a trait

an attitude

an approach
to a situation

a habit

a virtue

a personality
trait

a coping
response



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.
- Gratitude leads you to be nicer to other people: more cooperative, patient, and trusting.

PEOPLE WHO EXPRESS GRATITUDE SEE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

Grateful

- Gifts
- Welcoming
- Interesting
- Blessed
- Improving
- Hopeful
- Fortunate
- Abundant

Not so grateful

- Deprivation
- Deservingness
- Blessings
- Regrets
- Lack
- Need
- Scarcity
- Loss



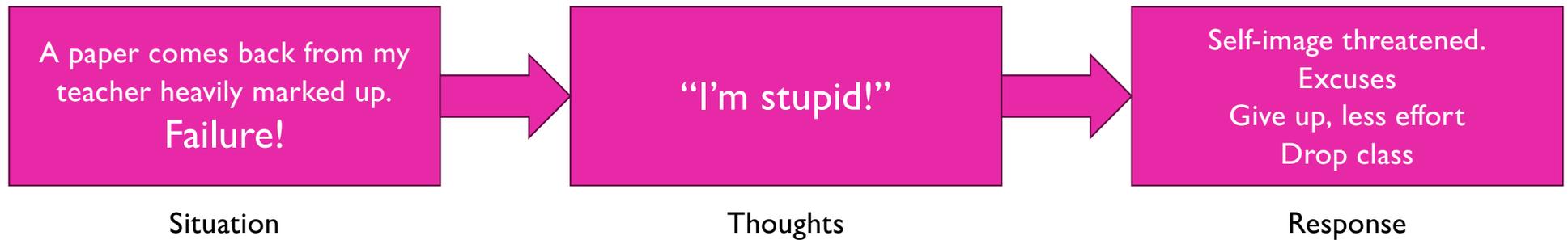
PROCESS MODEL OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION



See James Gross

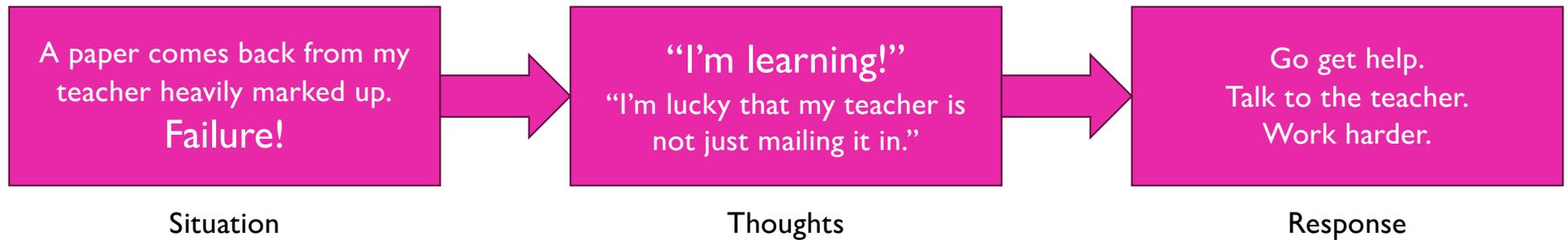
PROCESS MODEL OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION

EXAMPLE OF A THREAT TO SELF-ESTEEM



PROCESS MODEL OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION

EXAMPLE OF A THREAT TO SELF-ESTEEM



Gratitude

Appreciation for the benefits we receive, and the desire to reciprocate

A grateful person might think, “I get to go to class today,” whereas an ungrateful person might think, “Why do I have to learn all this useless stuff?”

A grateful person might think, “I ran further today than I did last week,” whereas an ungrateful person might think, “I wish I were as fast as her.”



- We realize what a positive impact we can have on people around us.
- We reflect upon the many good things in our lives.



SUBTLE IMPACTS OF GRATITUDE

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US



- Gratitude correlates with positive life outcomes.

- Gratitude is positively related to hope, forgiveness, pride, contentment, optimism, inspiration, and overall positive affect.

- **Studies have shown that people can build and improve their gratitude.**

Write a letter to a person who has influenced your life in a positive way (for example, a teacher, relative, mentor or coach).



GRATITUDE LETTERS

See: 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 ELEMENTS

Write a letter to a person who has influenced your life in a positive way (for example, a teacher, relative, mentor or coach).

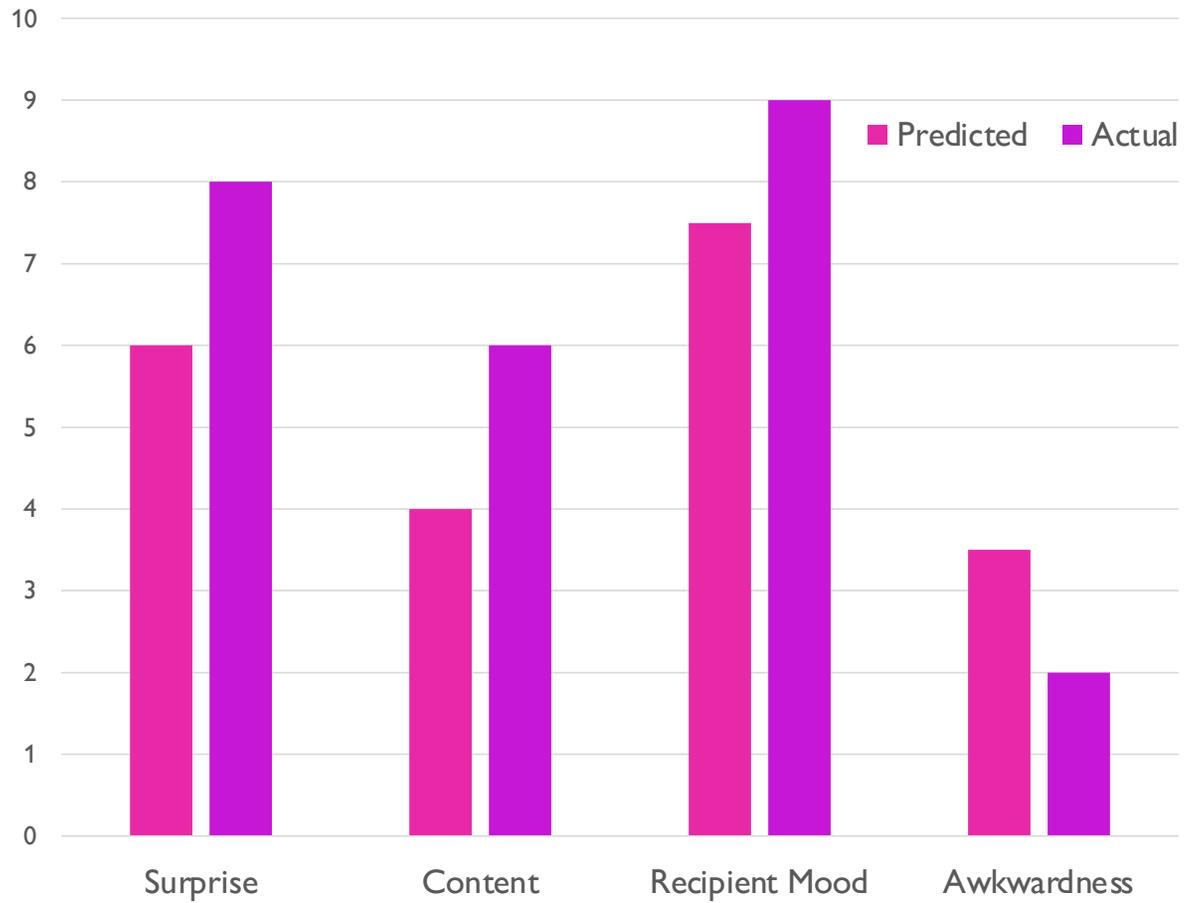
Focus on the positive influence of another person in your life.

Take your time. Use examples that make your gratitude tangible.

This does not have to be a perfect letter. The process reminds you that someone cares about you, and that you matter.

The experience may be more than you expected!

IMPACT OF GRATITUDE LETTERS



Kumar, A & Epley, N (2018). Undervaluing gratitude: Expressors misunderstand the consequences of showing appreciation.

I WRITE GRATITUDE LETTERS, TOO



Kirk Flatow <coach.flatow@gmail.com>

thank you for the thank you

3 messages

Angela Duckworth <aduckworth@characterlab.org>
To: Kirk Flatow <coach.flatow@gmail.com>

Wed, Jun 19, 2024 at 7:22 AM

1. at the risk of infinite regress, thank you for the thank you kirk.
2. i love that it was handwritten
3. i love that the stationary was white clouds against a blue sky
4. i don't even know where you buy stationary, but there's something just wonderful about it
5. am i even worthy of this gratitude?
6. the fact that you're slightly older and in many ways wiser makes me realize that mentoring can be domain-specific. in the domain of psychological science, and i'm happy to be your mentor. i've been here longer than you and have made it my calling.
7. i've noticed that you used to talk about your kids with qualifiers but not they're just your kids. i love that. they *are* your kids.
8. i have a book recommendation, because it says a lot about coaching and also about what a young person needs. beartown. almost done. massive fan of the author, who i now realize writes modern-day parables we all need to hear...
9. in sum, thank you! so happy that sometimes you help me, and sometimes i help you, and that together we share this allegiance to kids...who are everything :)

Angela Duckworth

Rosa Lee and Egbert Chang Professor, [University of Pennsylvania](#)
Faculty Co-Director, [Behavior Change For Good Initiative](#)
Co-Host, [Freakonomics No Stupid Questions](#)

[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Character Lab](#)

My work hours may not be your work hours. Reply if you want to, when you want to...



IDEAS FOR A GREAT GRATITUDE LETTER

- Ponder your message!
- Be explicit about what you are thankful for
- What is the impact on your life?
- Tell them you remember!
- If you are up for it, deliver in person, and even read it aloud to them!

“Cool is the enemy.”

-Chris Peterson

This will not be as awkward as you anticipate.

IDEAS FOR A GREAT GRATITUDE LETTER

What do you 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 had not met?

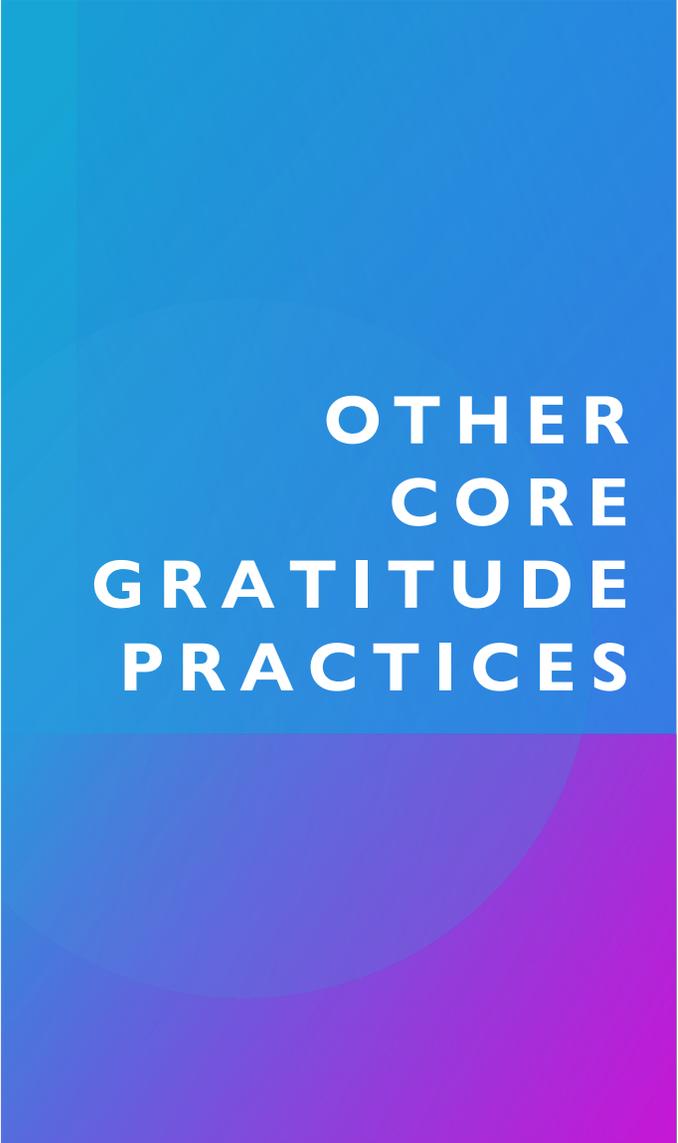
What character strengths do you appreciate most?

What makes them special/ important in your life story?

This will not be as awkward as you anticipate.

“Cool is the enemy.”

-Chris Peterson



**OTHER
CORE
GRATITUDE
PRACTICES**

Three Good Things

Gratitude Journal

Positive Portfolios

THREE GOOD
THINGS:

PRACTICE
NOTICING
THREE GOOD
THINGS THAT
HAPPEN TO
YOU,
EVERY DAY

This should take 10 minutes or less.

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

This brief exercise helps you reflect on the good things that happen to you every day; over time, this will become a habit.

THREE
GOOD
THINGS:

AT THE
END OF
THE DAY,
WRITE
DOWN 3
THINGS
THAT
WENT
WELL FOR
YOU AND
WHY

Date	1	2	3
<i>November 3-what went well</i>	<i>I did well on my math quiz!</i>	<i>Lunch was a lot of fun.</i>	<i>I helped a friend with a history assignment.</i>
<i>Why it went well</i>	<i>I studied hard and it paid off, even my teacher told me I did well</i>	<i>I have so many great friends. It was nothing special but we watched this dumb video together and laughed a lot.</i>	<i>They were a little confused and I was able to help them; that reminded me I know this material better than I thought I did.</i>

Participants in the experiment to validate this intervention experienced lasting effects, including an increase in happiness and positive affect and a decrease in depressive symptoms 6 months later. Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions.. *American Psychologist*, 60 (5) 410-21.



**INTRODUCING
MORE
GRATITUDE
INTO YOUR
LIFE**

**THINK OF DEVELOPING A
GRATITUDE HABIT LIKE
CHANGING YOUR DIET...THE
MORE BIZARRE THE DIET, THE
HARDER IT IS TO STICK WITH IT.**

**YOU NEED TO FIND AN
INTERVENTION THAT MAKES
SENSE FOR YOU IN YOUR LIFE.**

**PICK SOMETHING THAT
FEELS EASY FOR YOU.**



FINAL THOUGHTS

Expressing gratitude can benefit you just as much, or even more, than the person you're thanking.

I'm truly grateful for your participation in our Gratitude Project!

I hope this practice becomes a lifelong habit for you.

REFERENCES

Robert Emmons is the **man** in gratitude studies, and he taught at UC Davis. I think he is still professor emeritus there...if you go to Davis and get a chance to hear him talk or teach, do it!

- Boehm, J. K., Lyubomirsky, S., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). A longitudinal experimental study comparing the effectiveness of happiness-enhancing strategies in Anglo Americans and Asian Americans. *Cognition and Emotion*, 25(7), 1263–1272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2010.541227>
- Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks! How practicing gratitude can make you happier*. HarperOne.
- 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>
- Hori, D., Sasahara, S., Doki, S., Oi, Y., & Matsuzaki, I. (2020). Prefrontal activation while listening to a letter of gratitude read aloud by a coworker face-to-face: A NIRS study. *PLOS ONE*, 15(9), e0238715. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238715>
- Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J. K., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion*, 11(2), 391–402. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022575>
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being* (1. Free Press hardcover ed). Free Press.
- Toepfer, S. M., Cichy, K., & Peters, P. (2012). Letters of gratitude: Further evidence for author benefits. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13(1), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9257-7>