

# GRATITUDE LETTER FOR STUDENTS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **1 HOUR**



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

In addition to its benefits for adults, research suggests that **gratitude is also good for youth**, going hand in hand with greater hope and optimism, higher satisfaction with life, and fewer health complaints. Grateful adolescents also have better relationships, receiving more social support from others and being more kind and helpful in turn.

Like adults, however, students may miss opportunities to express their gratitude. The Gratitude Letter offers them a chance to reflect on the people who have made their life better, and to reach out and connect (or reconnect) with those people. As the instructions suggest, this can be fun and meaningful.

## TIME REQUIRED

In studies, students worked on their Gratitude Letters for about an hour, spread across five different days in a two-week period. The writing could also be completed on a single day.

## HOW TO DO IT

In this exercise, you will guide students to complete the **Gratitude Letter** practice, where they write a letter of thanks and then try to deliver it in person.

To introduce the exercise, the following script may be helpful:

Most everyone enjoys thanks for a job well done or for a favor done for a friend, and most of us remember to say “thank you” to others. But sometimes our “thank you” is said so casually or quickly that it is nearly meaningless.

In this exercise, you will have the opportunity to express your gratitude in a very thoughtful manner. Think of the people—parents, friends, coaches, teammates, and so on—who have been especially kind to you but whom you have never properly thanked. Choose one person you could meet individually for a face-to-face meeting in the next week.

Your task is to write a gratitude letter (a letter of thanks) to this individual and deliver it in person. The letter should be specific about what he or she did that affected your life. Make it sing!

It is important that you meet him or her in person. Don’t tell this person, however, about the purpose of this meeting. This exercise is much more fun when it is a surprise to the person you are thanking.

This activity is suitable for students in grades 3-12, although you may choose to adapt the instructions for younger age groups.

When teaching about gratitude in a school setting, it is important to keep in mind that students differ in terms of culture, race, socioeconomic status, and religious background. This may mean that they also differ in the way they express and practice gratitude, including verbal expressions, gestures, acts of kindness or caring, rituals, or gifts. Welcoming discussion of these and other differences in the classroom will deepen students' understanding of gratitude.

In addition, the experience of gratitude may be challenging for children facing personal struggles, community suffering, or systemic inequality. Rather than simply encouraging them to “look on the bright side,” researchers Jeffrey Froh and Giacomo Bono suggest listening deeply, empathizing, and acknowledging their feelings. This can help them cultivate resilience, which—along with other qualities like self-compassion and hope—could help plant the seeds for gratefulness.

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Froh, 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.

In this study, students in various grades either wrote and delivered a Gratitude Letter or journaled about their daily activities and feelings. The Gratitude Letter led to more positive feelings afterward; two months later, students who started the experiment relatively low in positive emotion showed significant improvements.

## WHY IT WORKS

When we’re grateful toward others, we experience many benefits. Not only do we focus on and savor the good things in our life, but we also realize that someone cared about us enough to provide it for us. That can inspire us to feel better about ourselves, as well as strengthening our relationship to that person.

The Gratitude Letter is one of the most powerful gratitude practices because you don’t just reflect on your gratitude, but also share it verbally. You get to see the other person’s reaction to your letter, which has been known to lead to tears, laughter, and hugs—a memorable experience for both people.

## SOURCES

[Giacomo Bono, Ph.D.](#), California State University, Dominguez Hills

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

