# **Your Name:**

# **Gratitude – Research & Application**

# Assignment Due: Monday, November 22nd / Worth 17% of final course grade

**Overview of assignment**

While everyone has an intuitive understanding of what it means to feel grateful, psychology research on the benefits of expressing gratitude only got its start in the early 2000s. This assignment will teach you about gratitude research, will provide an opportunity to apply your learning by engaging in an evidence-based gratitude exercise, and will ask you to reflect on your experience.

**Instructions for assignment**

Please complete both parts of this assignment *in the order in which they appear* in this document (Learn about Research on Gratitude, *then* Gratitude Letter & Reflection). Type your responses into this Word document underneath each question or prompt. Put your name at the top of the document, and save the file with your full name in the file name (e.g., Joe Smith Gratitude Assignment.doc). Save your file as a Microsoft Word document *or* PDF (my computer cannot read files saved from the Pages word processor). Please give yourself at least *2.5 hours* to complete, proofread, and upload this assignment to the “gratitude assignment” section of Moodle. Depending on whether you choose to read your gratitude letter to its recipient, you may need a bit more than 2.5 hours.

*Other tips and notes*

* Before you begin, look back at any feedback I provided on your Self-Compassion Assignment so you can apply what you learned here. If you have questions about that feedback, please ask!
* This assignment is worth more than one of our exams, so please complete it to the best of your ability if you’d like to do well on it! The key is to make sure to read all instructions carefully, read all questions carefully, and to *write complete answers/responses, fully explaining your thoughts*.
* Write in full sentences, using proper grammar. Remember the Writing Center in Humanities 102 is a good resource for written assignments. https://www.bsc.edu/academics/arc/centers.html
* I’m happy to review a draft if you bring it to a student office hours appointment. Book two consecutive 10-minute appointments to ensure enough time. I cannot give feedback via email. Of course, you can always come to office hours without a draft, and simply to ask questions.
* Sticking to the deadline (Nov. 22nd) allows me to provide feedback on your assignment in a timely manner. However, you may have up to a one-week extension (Nov. 29th) without penalty. Please take that extra time if you need it, especially if you want to deliver your letter in person.
* Assignments that are not turned in by midnight on Nov. 29th receive no credit.
* The gratitude letter will involve disclosing personal information. I want you to take the exercise seriously and be sincere. I will not ask you to discuss anything specific from your letter with your classmates, unless you want to. And, I promise not to discuss anything specific from your letter with anyone. All that said, see the instructions for the “Gratitude Exercise & Reflection” (p. 5) for a note about omitting your actual gratitude letter from the assignment you turn in on Moodle.

**Learn about Research on Gratitude (90 minutes)**

*In this part of the assignment, you’ll learn about the concept of gratitude from researchers who study it. Read through the questions below prior to reading the chapter and watching the video, so you’ll know what to focus on as you read and watch. Then, read the chapter, watch the video, and answer the questions in full sentences. The two sources contain overlapping content, but you’ll need to consume both to fully answer the questions. Look back at any feedback I provided on your Self-Compassion Assignment so you can apply what you learned to this assignment.*

**Based on information from the chapter and video, answer each of the questions below.**

1. First, an easy one – provide a definition of gratitude that was provided in either the chapter or the video. If you copy the definition word for word from either of your sources, put quotation marks around the definition, and cite the definition by putting the author(s)’ last name, and the year, in parentheses after the quotation marks.

E.g., Gratitude is “*type definition…..”* (Emmons, 2010). Or, Gratitude is “*type definition...”* (Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2016).

1. Discuss two of the specific positive effects of gratitude that you found the most interesting or relevant to you. For each, discuss the specific positive effect that gratitude has and why you found it interesting or relevant.
2. Select any two research studies that are discussed in some amount of detail in one or both of the sources. For each study you select, report what participants were asked to do in the study, and what the results showed. (Please avoid discussing studies that were not discussed in detail, such as if the researcher simply notes that “Studies show xyz,” but doesn’t go into any specifics about the method of the studies that show such effects.)
3. Engage in elaborative rehearsal! In particular, make at least two connections between the content from the gratitude chapter or video and any other concepts from our PY 101 course that you already know, whether that is content from the lectures, *The Happiness Lab* podcast episodes, or the videos on self-compassion. You should identify two concepts or ideas mentioned across the gratitude material and prior content from the course. Then discuss, what you had learned about this concept or idea prior to doing this assignment, and what was discussed with regard to this concept or idea in the gratitude chapter and/or video.
4. What additional questions do you have about any of the information from either of the sources? What else are you curious about, based on what you learned in the sources? To receive full credit here, please discuss at least two additional questions and/or topics you are curious about.

*If you are confused about what any of these questions are asking you to do, please ask me in class or office hours. I would be happy to clarify, but clarification is much easier to do in person, not via email.*

Sources – After reading the questions above, please read the following chapter and watch the video in order to answer the questions.

1.) Nelson, K.S., and Lyubomirsky, S. (2016). Gratitude. In H.S. Friedman (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of mental health* (2nd ed., Vol 2, pp. 277-280). Waltham, MA: Academic Press.

In this short chapter on gratitude, from the Encyclopedia of Mental Health, Nelson and Lyubomirsky define gratitude, and discuss the research on gratitude’s effect on mental health and well-being. In particular, they present research on how expressions of and acknowledgement of gratitude affect the ABCs (i.e., our affect, behavior, and cognition), and, through these effects, ultimately positively influence our mental health and well-being.

**http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/files/2012/09/Nelson-Lyubomirsky-2016.pdf**

2.) Video featuring Dr. Robert Emmons, from 2010:

In this 11-minute video, Dr. Robert Emmons (a psychology professor at the University of California, Davis, and also the founding editor of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*) discusses experimental research that provides evidence for various benefits of keeping *gratitude journals*.

**https://youtu.be/RRrnfGf5aWE**

**Gratitude Letter & Reflection** (60-90 minutes)

*In this part of the assignment you will learn about what is meant by a* gratitude letter*, complete the letter-writing exercise, answer some additional questions, and reflect on your experience. First read what is meant by a gratitude letter.*

*Gratitude letters* (also sometimes called *gratitude visits,* if you deliver the letter in person)

In the first part of this assignment, you learned what the concept of *gratitude* is, and the benefits of expressing gratitude. There are many ways to express gratitude, one of which is in a gratitude letter. A *gratitude letter* is a letter you write to a person to whom you owe gratitude, someone who has been especially kind to you but who you have never properly thanked. It may be your dad, aunt, or best friend from high school. Perhaps it’s a supervisor, teacher or coach. Alternatively, some people find it inspiring to write gratitude letters to individuals who they do not know personally but who have influenced their lives (such as authors, politicians, or artists) or made their lives easier (such as a store manager, a nurse, or staff member at your school). Ideally, though, this is a person to whom you could actually send or deliver the letter, if you chose to (rather than a person you could not possibly ever get in touch with).

In the letter, describe what the recipient has helped you with. While expressing general gratitude is fine and can be included (e.g., “thanks for always picking me up when I’m not feeling so great”), referring to specifics is even more effective (e.g., “thanks for being there for me when I found out that my parents were getting a divorce, and needed someone to talk to”). Explain what the person did or said, or the way they treated you, that was especially helpful and meaningful to you. You might give an example of a certain time that the person truly went above and beyond. Writing about specific events and specific details of their behaviors show the recipient that their actions truly mattered in your life. You might also include something about how frequently you think about what they have done for you.

Other notes:

Sometimes, people do things for us that make us feel extremely grateful, but what the person did might not sound like a big deal to someone else, or even to the person who we feel grateful toward. That’s fine; what is important and necessary is that *you* feel a deep sense of gratitude to this person, for whatever they did that helped you or made you feel good.

There is no minimum length for a gratitude letter. What is important is that you are sincere, thoughtful, and specific. Make sure to proofread your letter, as a well-written, carefully-proofed letter shows that you put time and care into expressing your gratitude.

The instructions for gratitude letters were adapted from the following sources: <https://gratefulness.org/resource/how-to-practice-gratitude/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-messages-letters-lists/>

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/appreciation-letter/>

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

Now that you know what a gratitude letter is, brainstorm some individuals to write the letter to, and ultimately select one person. In your assignment, explain who you will be writing to, and what their relationship is to you (how do you know them, how long have you known them, how well do you know them, etc.). Finally, *briefly* explain why you have chosen this person to write your letter to, and what, generally, you plan to write about.

Now, actually write the letter. You can type the letter or handwrite it. (I would love to see the actual letter you wrote, but if it contains too much personal information, you are welcome to just write the letter on your own and not turn it in to me. If you want to turn in a handwritten letter, just take pictures of it and paste those pictures into this Word document.)

Now that you have written the letter, *reflect on your experience* selecting the recipient and writing the letter. What was the experience like? What thoughts and feelings came into your mind? Consider also re-reading the letter at a later date (at least a day later), and then reflecting on what it was like to re-read your expression of gratitude. What you write about in this reflection is up to you, but please be thoughtful, and please explain your thoughts and feelings clearly.

Finally, select and complete one of the two options below:

Read the letter or send the letter (email) to the person you wrote it to. After they have read it (or had it read to them by you), discuss their reaction and any conversation you had about the letter and its content. Reflect on your experience communicating your gratitude directly to this person, and how this activity might affect your relationship with this person going forward. (If you delivered the letter but did not have a chance to hear back from the person after they had read it, then in this section you should discuss what you *anticipate* their reaction will be to reading the letter. Consider how their reading the letter might affect your relationship with this person.)

OR

You might choose not to give the letter to the person right away, or ever. If that’s the case, discuss why you are not going to give the letter to the person. If you might send it or read it to them at a later date, you might discuss why you are not going to send or read it right away. Finally, discuss what you anticipate their reaction would or will be to receiving the letter (whether or not you ever intend to send or read it to them). If you wrote your letter to a person that you don’t know well, consider how you might react to the letter if you were in their place. Consider how delivering the letter might affect your relationship with this person, if you do wind up delivering the letter at some point in the future.

*Final note: Writing a gratitude letter has been shown to affect well-being immediately after writing it, one week later, and one month later, but the effects on well-being decrease over time (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This means that to obtain long-term benefits, you should complete this exercise every so often. Consider composing a list of 12 individuals to whom you would like to write a gratitude letter, and write one per month for 2022!*