

HOW TO KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Time Required

15 minutes per day, at least three times per week for at least two weeks.

How to Do It

There's no wrong way to keep a gratitude journal, but here are some general instructions as you get started.

Write down up to five things for which you feel grateful. The physical record is important—don't just do this exercise in your head. The things you list can be relatively small in importance ("The tasty sandwich I had for lunch today.") or relatively large ("My sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy."). The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life—then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.

As you write, here are eight important tips:

1. Be as specific as possible - specificity is key to fostering gratitude. "I'm grateful that my co-workers brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday" will be more effective than "I'm grateful for my co-workers."
2. Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
3. Get personal. Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
4. Try subtraction, not just addition. Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
5. See good things as "gifts." Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you've received.
6. Savor surprises. Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.
7. Revise if you repeat. Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.
8. Write regularly. Whether you write daily or every other day, commit to a regular time to journal, then honor that commitment.

Why You Should Try It

It's easy to take the good things and people in our lives for granted, but research suggests that consciously giving thanks for them can have profound effects on our well-being and relationships. This exercise helps you develop a greater appreciation for the good in your life. In fact, people who routinely express gratitude enjoy better health and greater happiness.

Why It Works

While it's important to analyze and learn from bad events, sometimes we can think too much about what goes wrong and not enough about what goes right in our lives. A gratitude journal forces ourselves to pay attention to the good things in life we might otherwise take for granted. In that way, we start to become more attuned to the everyday sources of pleasure around us—and the emotional tone of our life can shift in profound ways. What's more, actually writing about these events is key: Research suggests translating thoughts into concrete language makes us more aware of them, deepening their emotional impact.

Evidence That It Works

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.

Participants who kept a gratitude journal weekly for 10 weeks or daily for two weeks experienced more gratitude, positive moods, optimism about the future, and better sleep.

Sources

[Robert Emmons, Ph.D.](#), University of California, Davis
[Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D.](#), University of California, Riverside

From the Greater Good in Action website of the Greater Good Science Center at University of California at Berkeley: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_journal

If you have children or young people in your life, there is information from Greater Good in Action about Gratitude Questions for Kids here: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_questions_for_kids