

# WELL-BEING: WHAT WENT WELL

How often do you focus on what went wrong while good things in your life go unrecognized? Positive psychology centers on recognizing and focusing on the good things that happen in life. These are experiences we often take for granted or ignore. The What Went Well exercises prompt us to stop, notice, and appreciate positive life events and experiences.

## *Gratitude Journaling Exercise: Cultivating Thankfulness and Positivity*

Gratitude is the feeling you get when something good happens to you or someone helps you live well. Many of us feel grateful for family, friends, or pets. Perhaps you were having difficulty understanding an assignment, and someone helped you. Practicing gratitude is foundational to well-being. Gratitude journaling is a powerful practice that can shift your focus towards the positive aspects of your life, foster a sense of appreciation, and boost overall well-being. This exercise will guide you through the process of keeping a gratitude journal. Find a quiet and comfortable space, and let's begin.

1. **Set aside dedicated time:** Choose a specific time each day to dedicate to your gratitude journaling. It could be in the morning to start your day with a positive mindset or in the evening to reflect on the day's events. Consistency is critical to reap the full benefits of this practice.
2. **Get a journal or notebook:** Find a journal or notebook you like and dedicate it solely to your gratitude journaling. You might prefer a physical or electronic one—choose whichever feels most comfortable.
3. **Reflect on the positive:** Take a moment to reflect on the positive aspects of your day or your life in general. Ask yourself: **WHAT WENT WELL TODAY?** These can be big or small things, simple or profound. It could be a pleasant interaction with a friend, a beautiful sunset you witnessed, a personal accomplishment, or anything that brings joy, gratitude, or appreciation.
4. **Write it down:** Start each entry by writing the date. Then, list three things you are grateful for. Be specific and descriptive, delving into the emotions associated with each item. For example, instead of "I'm grateful for my friends," you could write, "I'm grateful for my friends who always lend a listening ear and make me laugh when I need it the most."
5. **Focus on the details:** As you write, try to recall as many details as possible about each moment or thing you are grateful for. Engage your senses and emotions to make the experience more vivid and meaningful.
6. **Be consistent:** Make an effort to journal daily, even if some days are more challenging. The more you practice, the more you notice positive changes in your perspective and overall well-being.
7. **Avoid repetition:** While it's natural to be grateful for the same things day after day, challenge yourself to find new aspects to appreciate daily. This practice will help you broaden your perspective and notice more goodness.
8. **Embrace challenges:** Some days, you might find it difficult to identify positive aspects to write about, especially during tough times. During such moments, try to shift your focus

toward the lessons learned, personal growth, or even the tiniest moments of brightness amid the challenges.

9. No judgment: Remember that your gratitude journal is a personal and judgment-free space. There's no right or wrong way to feel grateful; you don't need to compare your journal to anyone else's. Be gentle with yourself and allow your authentic emotions to flow.

10. Review and reflect: Periodically, take the time to review your previous entries. Notice any recurring themes, positive patterns, or personal growth milestones. This reflection can deepen your appreciation and inspire you to continue your gratitude journey. Gratitude journaling is an effective and simple practice that can transform your outlook on life and bring more joy and contentment. Embrace the process with an open heart, and let the power of thankfulness guide you to a more positive and satisfying life.

### *Three Minutes of Gratitude*

1. Think of a moment that went well in the last 24 hours. Focus on it. Express gratitude for it in the way that is most comfortable for you. (1 minute)
2. Think of a person associated with your positive experience. Express gratitude for that person. (If you think the moment that went well only involved yourself, dig deeper to discover who prepared you for that moment, Name them and express gratitude for them.) (1 minute)
3. Think of why the moment went well and what you can take away from the moment to impact your next 24 hours. Express gratitude for the learning. (1 minute)

### *Gratitude Letter*

Think of someone who did something kind or helpful for you or acted in a way toward you for which you are incredibly grateful. This person could be a relative, friend, teammate, faculty, student, classmate, or colleague. Pick someone who is still alive and could meet you face-to-face in the next week. It could be the person you thought about in the Three Minutes of Gratitude exercise.

Write a letter to this person, guided by the following steps.

1. Write as though you are addressing this person directly ("Dear \_\_\_\_").
2. Don't worry about perfect grammar or spelling at first.
3. Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life (even for a moment.) Try to be as concrete as possible.
4. Describe what you are doing in your life now (today) and how you often remember their efforts.
5. Revise over a few days to make the letter more specific or improve your writing.
6. Sign the letter.

It is not necessary to send or share the letter with anyone. However, consider delivering the letter in person when complete to explore gratitude further. If you are interested, follow these steps:

1. Plan a visit with the recipient (something simple, coffee on the quad or a few minutes before class.) Let that person know you'd like to see them and have something special to share, but don't reveal the exact purpose of the meeting. [NOTE: If the person declines, accept their response and move on. Or, if you think they have refused because they want more detail, tell them you want to read a letter to them to express your gratitude.

Never force a meeting nor use the gratitude exercise to apologize, ask forgiveness, etc. The purpose of the letter is gratitude.]

2. When you meet, let the person know that you are grateful to them and would like to read a letter expressing your gratitude; ask that they refrain from interrupting until you're done.

3. Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to the person's reaction and your own.

4. After you have read the letter, be receptive to their reaction and discuss your feelings together.

5. Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.

6. If physical distance keeps you from visiting, you may choose to arrange a phone or video chat.