



## Gratitude and Blessings

Creative Wellbeing Workshops, LLC

Think of three things that went well today or three things for which you are grateful and write them down. These can be big or small. Write a couple of reflections on what about you or the situation made you able to appreciate it.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Often when people are given this suggestion, small blessings get mentioned. “I was able to find a parking space close by”, “there was a fresh breeze in the air this morning”, “traffic was light and I made it here on time”, “I had a tasty cup of coffee.” More weighty reflections emerge as well, “I’m grateful for my husband and my kids,” “that I can walk and talk,” “that I love my job and I am able to work”, or “I’m just happy to be alive”.



Although most of us can identify what is good in our lives, we are more likely to focus and dwell on what interrupts that field of positivity, a natural cognitive process as the *negativity bias*. In other words, although most of our experience is uneventfully positive (we are able to walk, talk, eat, work, play), when something disrupts this baseline, it immediately gets and holds our attention.

To use a visual metaphor, you could say that our attention is like a photograph. The “good” forms the background, it frames the picture but it is less distinct, may even go unnoticed; whereas the “bad” appears sharply clear in the foreground and commands our attention. This is understandable and actually helpful to us—it identifies that something needs to be dealt with. However, if we only notice problems, we do not have the opportunity to enjoy what is positive and good.

So, we use the blessings/gratitude exercise to bring this backdrop of positivity to the foreground. Research suggests that doing this exercise several times a week is most effective.

Why bother then if we are more naturally inclined to notice what is problematic? Because focusing on what is good in our lives makes us more hopeful, it relaxes us and makes us more receptive to others and to possibilities, it keeps us from taking things for granted, and it counteracts negative feelings. In other words, it makes us feel better! And when we feel better, we cope better with and feel empowered to handle the difficulties that confront us.

***“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life...It turns what we have into enough, and more. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.”***

Melody Beattie

Gratitude is multifaceted. Gratitude is seen as a character strength with which some of us are more or less endowed. Think of people you know whose answer to you asking them how they're doing is, "Blessed!" In other words, some people are just naturally appreciative and attuned to the blessings in their lives.



Gratitude is also the behavior of *being* grateful. This includes doing exercises that bring our attention to what is functional and good in our lives. Gratitude is also a feeling that we experience when we emotionally connect with a sense of appreciation.

We often experience gratitude when we notice others who are suffering in ways that we could not imagine. This “downward comparison”--whereby we judge ourselves against people in more unfortunate circumstances than our own--can induce gratitude and compassion. “It thought my situation was bad but what she is going through must be so difficult...”. It helps us to step outside of ourselves and feel empathy for the plight of others who are struggling.

#### Other gratitude exercises:

- A. Think about what is going well for you at this moment.
- B. Think about what is going well in your life in general.
- C. Think about what is going well for others in your life.
- D. Think about what is going well in the world.

We recommend “Gratitude Journaling” in which you record your blessings and even do artwork (drawing, collage, painting) to represent those things for which you are grateful.

**Resources:** (go to [www.creativewellbeingworkshops.com](http://www.creativewellbeingworkshops.com) to explore more resources)

- [Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier.](#) Robert Emmons
- [Positivity.](#) Barbara Fredrickson
- [Flourish.](#) Martin Seligman
- [The Gratitude Project: How the Science of Thankfulness Can Rewire Out Brains for Resilience, Optimism, and the Greater Good.](#) Jeremy Adam Smith, Kira Newman, Jason Marsh, and Dacher Keltner
- [Gratitude and Wellbeing.](#) Randy and Lorie Sansone