



## What is Gratitude?

**Gratitude is the appreciation of benefits in one's life and the recognition that the source of these benefits lies at least partially outside the self.**

**What does it mean to be more grateful?**

1. Increase the intensity of our grateful emotions.
2. Increase the frequency of our gratitude.
3. Increase the density of our gratitude (i.e., grateful for many things/people within a single event).
4. Increase the span of our gratitude (i.e., gratitude in diverse domains of our lives).

**3 aspects of gratitude to consider:**

1. Noticing and appreciating goodness in one's life.
2. Recognizing the source of gratitude, which can include individuals, groups of individuals, an organization, culture/community, society, and God/a higher power.
3. Expressing gratitude to a benefactor (verbally, gifts, action).

Gratitude helps you desire what you already have rather than what you don't!

The following pages of this document will offer valuable information, tips, and tools to enhance your gratitude practice including:

- Why We're Happier and Healthier When We're Grateful?
- Practices that Boost or Hinders our Ability to Be Grateful
- A List of 100 Questions to Generate Gratitude
- Additional Resources

# Why We're Happier and Healthier When We're Grateful

1. Gratitude changes the way we think. We start paying attention to the positive things in our life and less to the negative things in our lives.
2. Gratitude reduces negative social comparison and envy. Instead of dwelling on how others are better than us, we begin to focus instead on how others have been kind to us.
3. Gratitude is a gateway to other positive feelings. When we feel grateful, we are also more likely to experience other positive feelings, such as joy, love, and hope.
4. Gratitude undermines our negative feelings. When we feel grateful, we're less likely to feel sad, anxious, and angry.
5. Gratitude helps us cope with stressful experiences by reminding us of what is positive in our lives in the midst or even as a result of suffering.
6. Gratitude helps us reframe our negative experiences. We begin to think about our negative experiences in a new light and realize that they may not be as bad as we originally thought they were.
7. Gratitude gives us new insights about life. When we're grateful, we begin to think about our lives, others, and the world from a new perspective.
8. Gratitude makes our lives more meaningful. When we're grateful, we focus on the big picture and begin to make sense of the important things and events in our lives.
9. Gratitude makes us more spiritual. When we're grateful, we become less materialistic and, for some of us, more attuned to the sacred or transcendent aspects of life.
10. Gratitude makes us more content. Much of our energy is spent pursuing things we don't have. Gratitude reverses our priorities to help us value the things we actually have.

11. Gratitude helps us not to take the good things in our lives for granted. When we're grateful, we find new ways to appreciate the good things in our lives.
12. Gratitude guards against self-pity and narcissism. Instead of wallowing in self-importance or the misery of our lives, we marvel at how we've been blessed. We begin to view our lives as a precious gift to us.
13. Gratitude helps us achieve our goals in life, possibly because it generates positive thoughts and feelings that enable us to pursue our goals more effectively.
14. Gratitude helps us to think about others in more positive ways. Instead of focusing only on others' faults, we become less resentful and more empathic toward others; we also notice their strengths and their kindness toward us.
15. Gratitude improves our relationships with others. Gratitude spurs us to connect more with people to whom we're grateful and as a result, others respond more positively to us. Consequently, gratitude fosters trust, forgiveness, reconciliation, and intimacy.
16. Gratitude improves our social networks. When we are grateful, we are less cynical and suspicious about people. We are more willing to trust others, which allows us to connect with more people at a deeper level.
17. Gratitude increases altruism and generosity. Because we feel that our lives have been richly blessed, we are motivated to give back to others and to society.
18. Gratitude improves our physical health possibly because it inhibits unhealthy stress and emotions. The positive thoughts and feelings that gratitude generates may also provide us with the motivation to pursue healthy behaviors (e.g., exercise).

# GRATITUDE BUSTERS AND BOOSTERS

Gratitude Busters	Gratitude Boosters
<p><b>Negative social comparison:</b> Being preoccupied with how others are better than you are or have more than you have. (This can also happen among group members.)</p>	<p><b>Comparisons with our past self:</b> Instead of comparing yourself to others, think about a time in your life when something positive that you now have did not exist and then focus on the fact that you now have it.</p>
<p><b>Taking good things for granted:</b> Forgetting or taking for granted blessings in your life that you were once grateful for.</p>	<p><b>Positive mental subtraction:</b> Focus on something/someone good in your life that you may have taken for granted. Now imagine that that thing or person is now gone from your life – think about how your life would be different.</p>
<p><b>Yeah, but.</b> This is a form of negative self-talk. Each time you acknowledge something good in your life, you have an immediate rebuttal that explains why it is not as positive as it seems, e.g., <i>YEAH, I it's true that my coach complimented me on my skills, BUT that was the only time she has ever done that.</i></p>	<p><b>Yeah, but, but.</b> It's important not to beat yourself up for engaging in <i>yeah, buts</i>. However, each times you catch yourself engaging in <i>yeah, but</i> thinking, simply provide a positive rebuttal to your original rebuttal, e.g., e.g., <i>YEAH, I it's true that my coach complimented me on my skills, but that was the only time she has ever done that, BUT...it's a still big deal because she rarely offers compliments to anyone, so I know she genuinely meant it, and I'm grateful for the affirmation.</i></p>
<p><b>Entitlement mentality:</b> Focusing excessively on your rights, what you deserve, or how others should treat you. When we adopt this mindset, it becomes much harder to be grateful.</p>	<p><b>Gift mentality:</b> Adopt the mentality that life is a gift. Assume that nobody owes us anything and that many of the blessings in our lives are gifts that we don't deserve – this cultivates humility, which ultimately results in gratitude.</p>
<p><b>Fixed mindset:</b> Believing that your level of gratitude is fixed, or that you're naturally bad at gratitude, and there's nothing you can do about it.</p>	<p><b>Growth mindset:</b> Believing that gratitude is like a muscle that can be strengthened through repeated exercise. Although some people might be "naturally" more grateful than others, almost anyone can become more grateful by practicing gratitude.</p>
<p><b>Unrealistic expectations:</b> Expecting dramatic positive effects from one or two gratitude activities.</p>	<p><b>Realistic expectations:</b> This is similar to having a growth mindset. If gratitude is like a muscle, practicing gratitude on a regular basis is needed to generate positive outcomes.</p>

Gratitude Busters	Gratitude Boosters
<p><b>Intellectualization:</b> spending too much time on the intellectual aspects of gratitude (e.g., debating the research or the philosophical aspects of gratitude) and neglecting the actual practice of gratitude.</p>	<p><b>Just do it:</b> Talking about gratitude is not the same as practicing gratitude. The best way to cultivate gratitude is to simply practice gratitude regularly, e.g., gratitude journaling on a daily basis. In terms of practice, writing about what you're grateful for and expressing gratitude to someone else is better than simply having grateful thoughts.</p>
<p><b>Mindless ritual:</b> If you focus repeatedly on the same things that you're grateful for every day, the happiness you derive from this focus may fade over time. Boredom sets in and gratitude becomes a mindless ritual. This tends to happen because of a process known as hedonic adaptation (we adapt to the positive experiences and return to a baseline level of happiness).</p>	<p><b>Embrace variety:</b> Variety is a useful weapon against boredom. Challenge yourself to find new things to be grateful for (see Appendix B), or for one thing that you're grateful for, try to identify something new or novel that you haven't previously paid attention to.</p>

# List of Questions to Generate Gratitude

Questions to help us reflect on what we're grateful for and whom we're grateful to.

## **Micro Gratitude**

1. What went well this week?
2. What are some simple, potentially mundane things that contribute to my well-being?
3. What are some good things in my life that I've taken for granted?
4. What are some things in my home that provide me with a sense of comfort?
5. What do I like about the weather this week?
6. What do I like about my office/classroom?
7. What is my favorite place in town/campus?
8. What do I like about IU?
9. What went unexpectedly well at work/school this week?
10. What do I like most about my job/school?
11. What do I like about the mode of transportation I use on a regular basis (e.g., bus/bicycle/car)?
12. What do you like about your cellphone/tablet/laptop/computer?
13. What are some resources I have in my workplace/school that others might not have access to?
14. What was my favorite meal this week and why?
15. What is my favorite restaurant and what do I like about it?
16. What is my favorite hobby and what I do like about it?
17. What do I like about the city or country I live in?
18. What pleasant activity do I participate in each week?
19. What went better than expected recently?
20. In what ways have I been pleasantly surprised this week?
21. What opportunities have I had to use my strengths/talents?
22. What opportunities have I had to pursue my interests?
23. What opportunities have I had to serve others?

## **Gratitude Savoring**

24. What do I enjoy about the food/beverage I eat/drink?
25. What do I enjoy about the physical surroundings near my home/on campus?
26. What do I enjoy about the music I listen to?

## **Interpersonal Gratitude**

27. Which of my teachers/mentors contributed positively to my life?
28. Who puts a smile on my face?
29. Who makes me laugh?
30. In what ways do my family members make my life easier?
31. In what ways have my family members made me a better person?
32. In what ways were my parents positive role models?
33. What do I like about my partner/spouse?
34. How does my partner/spouse make my life easier?
35. What did my partner/spouse do for me today that was helpful?
36. Who has been a blessing to my life?
37. Who has been a source of strength in my life?
38. Who has been a source of emotional support in my life?
39. Who has been a source of practical help in my life?
40. Who has been a source of encouragement to me?
41. Who inspires me and why?
42. Which colleague(s) do I like and why?
43. Which colleague(s) appreciates my work?
44. In what ways do my colleagues make my life easier?
45. With whom did I have a pleasant interaction at work this week?
46. Who took the initiative to talk with me at work this week?
47. Who defended me or spoke out on my behalf?
48. Who has reached out to help me recently?
49. What do I like about each of my friends?
50. With whom did I have an enjoyable conversation this week?

### **Redemptive Gratitude**

Think about a stressful or difficult experience in your life.

51. In what ways is my life better now? What have I learned to appreciate as a result of this stressful experience?
52. What challenges did I overcome?
53. How have I grown as a person or what character strengths did I develop as a result of this stressful experience?
54. What new, positive insights did I gain about life as a result of this stressful experience?
55. In what ways is my life more meaningful as a result of this stressful experience?
56. In what ways did this stressful experience provide me with new opportunities (i.e., when a door closed, a new window opened).
57. Who supported me during this stressful experience?
58. Whom did I become closer to as a result of this stressful experience?

## **Macro Gratitude**

59. [Think about the major events in your life] What am I most grateful for in these events?
60. [Think about a turning point in your life] What am I most grateful for in this event?
61. Who or what changed my life for the better?
62. What childhood event in my life contributed positively to my current life?
63. Which childhood friends contributed positively to my life?
64. Who has had the most positive influence on my life?
65. In what ways is my life a gift? In what ways have I experienced grace (undeserved favor) from life or from others?
66. What are the top one or two things/people in my life for whom I am most grateful?
67. What opportunities have I had in life that tell me that my life is good?
68. In what ways have I grown as a person?
69. What gives me meaning in life?
70. What gives me hope for the future?

## Additional Resources on Gratitude

Caution: we certainly encourage you to read these articles and books as they can enhance our understanding and improve our practice of gratitude. It is also important that these resources do not become a substitute for the actual practice of gratitude (recall the problem of intellectualization – see Appendix B). We will not become more grateful by reading about gratitude; we become more grateful by practicing gratitude. 😊

1. Brief articles on gratitude on the website of the Greater Good Science Center: <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude>
2. *Gratitude Works! A 21-Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity* by Robert Emmons (2013).
3. *Gratitude and the Good Life* by Philip Watkins (2013). (This book provides an academic, research-oriented perspective on gratitude.)