
APPENDIX 9.1: Instructions for Student Take-Home Activity

This activity allows you to express your gratitude to someone you can no longer thank. They may have passed away, or you may have lost touch with them. Think about what you would like to say to them in preparation for this activity. There is no need to prepare anything else.

Get two chairs and arrange them in a way that represents your relationship with the person. They can be close together, far apart, side by side, or one behind the other.

Once you are happy with the setup, sit in one chair and express your gratitude and appreciation to the imagined person in the empty chair. Look directly at the empty chair and tell the imagined person what you are grateful for. For example, you might say,

Dad, I appreciated that you always volunteered to coach me in Little League and took the time to take us on family vacations every summer. You made sure we spent time together, and even as I got older and more independent, you always showed an interest in what I was doing.

Follow this with any other statements of gratitude you have for the person.

Once you are finished, switch roles and become the receiver. Now respond as if the gratitude had just been expressed to you. Become the person you are thanking and say what you think they would say. In the above example, the dad might reply,

It was not an easy decision to quit my job to stay home and raise you. But I am so glad that it worked out for us financially. Spending time with you was one of my favorite things to do. I am so proud of the man you have become and so grateful to be your father.

Return to your original chair and say a closing remark to the empty chair.

Writing reflections on the activity:

1. What is something that stood out to you about this exercise?

2. What is something that you will remember and take away from this exercise?

3. What aspects of the VGV were difficult or uncomfortable for you? Why?
4. Has this exercise helped you think differently about gratitude or the person to whom you expressed your thanks?
5. A prominent neuroscientist recently said, "The intentional practice of gratitude could have significant positive implications for the harmony of the human civilization, from interpersonal relationships to international diplomacy" (Henning et al., 2017, Neuroscientist section). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Can you draw a connection between your personal practice of the VGV and the interpersonal harmony that is described in this quote?

APPENDIX 9.2: Gratitude Letter Instructions (as a Point of Comparison With the VGV)

Call to mind someone who did something for you for which you are extremely grateful but to whom you never expressed your deep gratitude. This could be a relative, friend, teacher, or colleague. Try to pick someone who is still alive and could meet you face-to-face in the next week. It may be most helpful to select a person or act that you haven't thought about for a while—something that isn't always on your mind.

Now, write a letter to one of these people, guided by the following steps:

- Write as though you are addressing this person directly (“Dear _____”).
- Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life. Try to be as concrete as possible.
- Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember their efforts.
- Try to keep your letter to roughly one page (around 300 words).

Next, you should try, if at all possible, to deliver your letter in person, following these steps:

- Plan a visit with the recipient. 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.
- 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.
- Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to their reaction as well as your own.
- After you have read the letter, be receptive to their reaction and discuss your feelings together.
- Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.