

# **Are Some Ways of Expressing Gratitude More Beneficial Than Other?:**

## **Results from a Randomized Controlled Experiment**

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### Abstract

Gratitude activities have been shown to increase well-being and other positive outcomes in numerous experiments to date. The current study tested whether self-directed gratitude interventions that vary by type (i.e., social vs. nonsocial) and format (i.e., long-form letters vs. shorter lists) produce differential benefits. To that end, 958 Australian adults were assigned to one of six activities to complete each day for 1 week, including five gratitude activities that varied by type and format and an active control condition (i.e., keeping track of daily activities). Regressed change analyses revealed that, overall, long-form writing exercises produced greater well-being benefits than lists. Indeed, those who wrote social and nonsocial gratitude *lists* did not differ from controls on any well-being outcomes. However, participants who listed what they were grateful for (unconstrained) reported greater feelings of gratitude and positive affect than did controls. Finally, relative to the other gratitude conditions, participants who wrote gratitude letters to particular individuals in their lives not only showed stronger feelings of gratitude, elevation, and other positive emotions but also reported feeling more indebted. This study demonstrates that not only does gratitude “work” to boost well-being relative to an active neutral activity, but that some forms of gratitude are more effective than others. We hope these findings help scholars and practitioners to develop, tailor, implement, and scale future gratitude-based interventions.

*Keywords:* gratitude, well-being, intervention