



3 GRATITUDE EXERCISES

FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

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Welcome

It is a great pleasure to offer you this compilation of gratitude tools. During the past years, Positive Psychology has gained an increasing amount of attention, both from helping professionals and researchers. This attention has resulted in many valuable insights in what contributes to a happy, fulfilling life. In addition, positive psychology has given us many tools not only to flourish, but also to cope with difficult times in life.

Since 2013, our aim with PositivePsychology.com has been to contribute to this field by disseminating the science to psychology practitioners and educators alike.

We hope that the tools presented here may inspire you too to increase your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you. Please feel free to print and share this document with others.

For those who like what they see, make sure to also check out our online searchable database with all kinds of practical positive psychology tools:

<https://positivepsychology.com/toolkit/>

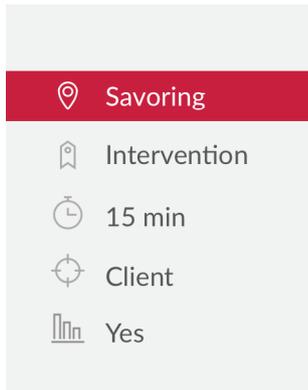
All the best!

Seph Fontane Pennock
Hugo Alberts, Ph.D.



Using the tools

This product contains 3 different gratitude tools. Each tool is structured in the same way, consisting of a background section, a goal description, advice for using the exercise and suggested readings. On the first page of every tool, a legend is shown, consisting of several icons:



- The first icon displays the main category the tool belongs to.
- The second icon shows the type of tool. The following options are available:
 - » Exercise (a tool that describes an activity that is done once, during a session)
 - » Assessment (a tool that aims to assess a trait or characteristic of a person)
 - » Overview (a tool that provides an overview or list of something; research findings, facts, etc.)
 - » Advice (a tool that is directed at the helping professional providing advice on how to carry out a certain activity)
 - » Meditation (a tool that describes a form of meditation)
 - » Intervention (a tool that describes an activity that needs to be done more than once during a certain period)
- The third icon provides an estimation of the duration of the tool. In other words, how long it takes to complete the exercise. This is always an estimation of the total time it takes. Note that for some tool types, like overview, advice, protocol and intervention it is difficult if not impossible to provide an estimation of the duration. In these cases n/a (not available) is written.
- The fourth icon describes the intended audience for this tool; available options include client, coach or group.
- The last icon indicates whether this specific tool has been tested at least once in a scientific study and has been published in a peer reviewed journal (yes or no). Note that if there is a strong theoretical and scientifically tested basis underlying the tool, but the tool itself in its current form has not been directly addressed in research, the icon will still indicate “no”.

Important note

Please note that the tools in this give-away are not a substitute for a clinical or coaching certification

program, which we recommend you take before you call yourself an official “therapist” or “coach” and before you see clients or patients.

Note that you are advised to use these tools within the boundaries of your professional expertise. For instance, if you are a certified clinician, you are advised to use the exercises within your field of expertise (e.g. clinical psychology). Likewise, a school teacher may use the exercises in the classroom, but is not advised to use the exercises for clinical populations. Positive Psychology B.V. is not responsible for unauthorized usage of these tools.

Creating Savoring Rituals

Savoring

 Exercise

 n/a

 Client

 No

When we contemplate the things that would make us happy, we tend to think of extraordinary and memorable events - going on a trip of a lifetime or a lottery win, for instance. Yet consistently noticing and savoring small, everyday positive moments can have a significant effect on happiness, resilience, well-being, and overall life satisfaction (Bryant, 2003; Quoidbach et al., 2010). Subjective well-being is not likely to be significantly improved by savoring only truly extraordinary positive events, which are often, by nature, rare and sporadic. Indeed, the *frequency* of positive experiences is a much better predictor of happiness than the *intensity* of those experiences (Diener et al., 2009).

Savoring is the capacity to notice, appreciate, enhance, and prolong the positive experiences in life, with deliberate attention to and awareness of positive emotions (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Jose et al., 2012). Increased awareness of pleasurable sensations lies at the very heart of savoring; when time is taken to notice and savor pleasant experiences, not only can we recognize positive emotions, but we can also fully appreciate them.

Sensory-perceptual sharpening is a specific savoring strategy whereby one exerts efforts to be fully present at certain moments by deliberately directing attention to the pleasant experience (Bryant & Veroff, 2017). How people direct their attention during positive events has been found to influence their experience of positive emotions. For instance, research findings in the field of mindfulness, defined as the ability to fully present in the moment, have shown that increasing mindfulness can enhance the experience of positive emotions. In a study by Geschwind, Peeters, Drukker, van Os, and Wichers (2011), adults with a lifetime history of depression who received mindfulness training were found to experience momentary positive emotions more often, and they showed greater appreciation of and enhanced responsiveness to pleasant daily-life activities.

Additionally, research by Erisman and Roemer (2010) revealed that mindfully watching a positive film was associated with elevated levels of positive affect. In another study, Tuorila, Meiselman, Bell, Cardello, and Johnson (1994) found that attention to sensory experiences (e.g., taste, smell, appearance) while eating increased liking for familiar foods. In sum, the above-described findings all support the value of “experiential immersion” to amplify positive affect. This tool was designed to increase positive emotions by using sensory-perceptual sharpening as a savoring strategy for small, everyday moments of pleasure.



Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston and Hugo Alberts.



Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients deliberately create savoring rituals around small, everyday moments of pleasure. In this way, clients may learn to stop, notice, enjoy, and prolong the positive experiences that can be found in everyday activities.



Advice

- The list of activities generated in step 1 provides clients with a source of ideas and inspiration to help build moments of joy and pleasure in their daily routines. Initially, clients may find it difficult to recognize and select activities that they could savor throughout a day; however, it should be emphasized that opportunities for savoring pleasant experiences can be found even in the most mundane of tasks. It is also important to note that many pleasant experiences cannot be planned; therefore, clients should be encouraged to savor unexpected pleasant moments with this exercise.
- Savoring requires the client's full attention; hence, multitasking should be avoided during savoring rituals. Emphasize that the activity should be the client's primary focus - do one thing at a time and do not rush. When we multitask, we inevitably pay less attention to any one thing and thus enjoy all those things less. For instance, a client eating a meal while distractedly surfing the Internet will not experience as much pleasure from the food as he/she would if he/she focused on one thing at a time. Clients should slow down, give the activity their complete attention, and appreciate the complete experience.
- Clients must make a conscious choice each day to seek out opportunities to savor good things. By choosing to savor the build-up, experience, and memory of pleasant activities (and the positive emotions that accompanied them), clients will begin to build a savoring mindset, allowing them to recognize everyday activities as a source of pleasure and enjoyment.
- Practitioners should be aware of dampening behaviors. Rather than lingering in - and prolonging - good feelings, clients might cut them short by suppressing positive emotions, distracting themselves from an enjoyable moment, or fault-finding in an otherwise favorable situation. Remind clients that they must recognize, explore, and enjoy the positive emotions they experience.
- Savoring just two pleasurable experiences each day can have a significant effect on optimism, happiness, and well-being, among many others. As such, it is recommended that clients commit at least two pleasurable moments each day to savoring.
- One of the greatest pitfalls of savoring is focusing too much on the evaluation of positive feelings without allowing the experiences/feelings just to take place. Researchers have found that while systematically analyzing positive moments can increase interest in the event, it does not induce further enjoyment, whereas simple mental replaying of the event can induce both interest in and enjoyment of these moments (Vittersø, Overwien, & Martinsen, 2009). Therefore, clients should be encouraged to focus on connecting with their feelings rather than on analyzing them.



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Creating Savoring Rituals

It is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that happiness is just around the corner. Many everyday positive experiences pass by without being noticed, appreciated, or enjoyed. How can you respond to these good things in ways that emphasize their positive effects? Savoring is a way to notice and enjoy positive experiences that are already present in our day-to-day lives. Making a conscious choice each day to notice and savor the things we like is an effective way to balance the negative effects of stress, promote resilience in the face of adversity, and increase positive emotions.

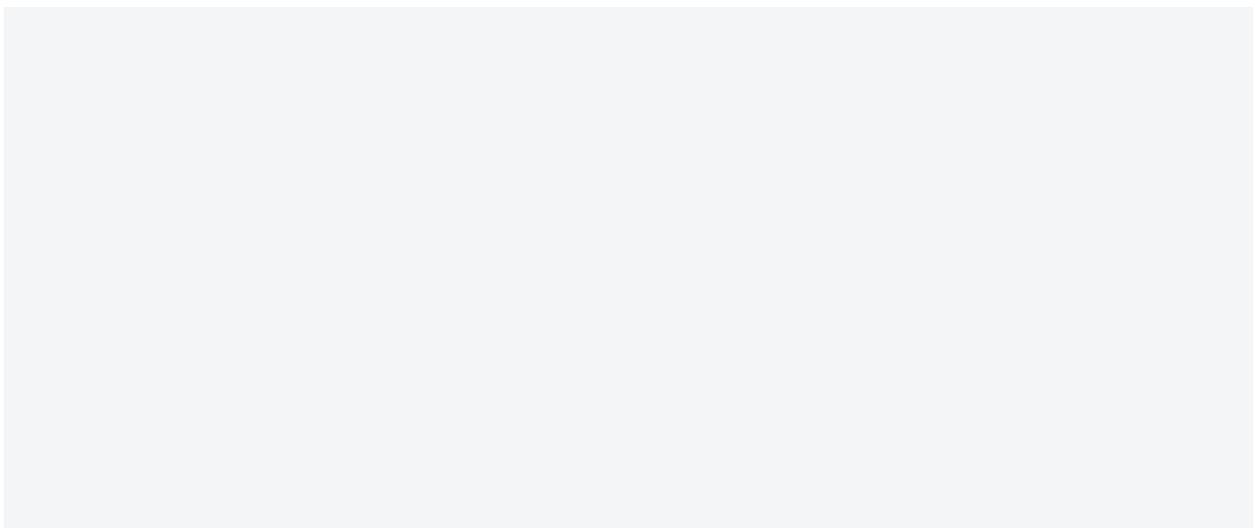
You do not need to wait passively for an extraordinary life event to occur to savor and enhance positive emotions. In reality, opportunities to savor pleasant experiences can be found almost anywhere, even while experiencing challenging life events. The number of positive experiences you have is much more critical than how special or exceptional those experiences are. In other words, it is more beneficial to savor those ordinary (yet pleasant) everyday activities rather than wait for extraordinary life events that do not happen very often.

The goal of this exercise is to help you stop, notice, enjoy, and prolong positive experiences that can be found in everyday activities.

Step 1: Identify everyday activities that bring you pleasure

This step is to get you thinking about the everyday things that give you pleasure. In other words, what do you look forward to on an average day?

Take a few moments to think about enjoyable activities that you can pursue and savor during an average day. These could include your morning cup of coffee, a hot bath, or a short stroll in the sunshine during your lunch hour. You should ensure that the activities are common sources of pleasure and enjoyment for you. List those activities below:



Step 2: Experience pleasure as it happens

You must choose to savor two enjoyable experiences each day for at least two weeks. These should be ordinary activities from your daily routine that you might typically rush through. No matter what you choose to savor, focus on fully immersing yourself in the experience. Avoid outside distractions, turn off your cell phone, put everything else aside, and give the activity your complete attention. Slow down and notice and appreciate the positive aspects of the activity, paying close attention to and filtering out any thoughts that interfere with your savoring of this moment. If your mind begins to wander, simply bring your attention back to the positive sights, sounds, and smells around you.

Think of this step as a way to create a memory. Paying attention to your senses will help you savor the moment thoroughly and evoke pleasant memories of your experiences. Pay close attention to as many positive sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations as you can.

Use as many of your senses as possible. What do you see, smell, hear, feel, or taste? For instance, if you have chosen your morning coffee as one of your pleasurable experiences, try to pay attention to the smell of freshly ground coffee. What words would you use to describe this? Rich? Sweet? Earthy? Close your eyes for that first sip. Describe the sensation and taste in as much detail as possible. Notice the pleasant surroundings and your positive feelings and try to prolong the experience for as long as you can.

Reflection

At the end of each week, take some time to record your reflections on creating your savoring rituals.

Recall as many of the positive emotions that you experienced and savored in the past seven days as you can. Write them down in the space below.

From the list above, which three positive emotions did you experience most often throughout the exercise?



Looking back over the past seven days, have you *noticed* more positive emotions compared to your typical week?

While savoring your chosen moments, did you feel your attention shifting away from the exercise? If so, what actions did you take to return your focus to the positive event?

When you think back on your savoring experiences, do you feel more appreciative of small moments of pleasure?

Did savoring make you feel more *aware* of the pleasant experiences that can be found all around you?



Did you find that savoring certain moments made these experiences more pleasurable than before?

What did you enjoy most throughout this exercise?

Did you find anything challenging throughout this exercise? If so, what?

Do you find yourself looking forward to savoring these activities in the future?

Did you share your experience with others? If so, how did this make you feel? How did others react?

Experiencing Awe

 Savoring

 Intervention

 15 min

 Client

 Yes

Awe is described as the emotion that arises in response to experiences that we perceive to be strikingly vast and changes the way we understand the world (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker (2012) discovered that evoking a sense of awe expands people's perception of time, reduces feelings of impatience, increases willingness to volunteer time to help other people, leads to a stronger preference for experiences over material products, and increases life satisfaction. They concluded that "experiences of awe bring people into the present moment, and being in the present moment underlies awe's capacity to adjust time perception, influence decisions, and make life feel more satisfying than it would otherwise" (p. 1130).

This tool was designed to help clients tap into the experience of awe. Clients are asked to recall a time when they experienced awe and to write about this experience in detail. Then, as an optional next step, clients are invited to keep a diary about their awe experiences.



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (Ph.D.) and Lucinda Poole (PsyD).



Goal

The goal of this tool is to help clients evoke and savor the feeling of awe.



Advice

- As the optional step 3, the practitioner may work with clients to come up with their most preferable way to diarize awe moments. For instance, whereas some clients might like to print out copies of the 'My Awe Diary' template provided (see the Appendix), others might prefer to document awe moments digitally using their phone or computer.
- Advise clients that every day presents opportunities for them to savor and enjoy awe moments, though a level of mindfulness is required to take these opportunities. Without some degree of mindfulness, they are unable (or at least much less likely) to notice an awesome experience, let alone bask in it.

- Some clients mistakenly believe that awe can only be experienced in great, life-changing events. For these clients, it is important to understand that awe can be found in everyday commonplace things. The practitioner may provide some personal examples that illustrate this point.
- This tool may be particularly valuable for clients who are feeling overwhelmed by everyday stress or negative affect. Research has shown that evoking awe has a way of lifting people outside of their usual selves and connecting them with something more substantial and more significant. Taking the time to reflect on past experiences of awe (Steps 1 and 2) can help people develop a broader sense of connectedness and purpose and help them relieve negative moods and improve happiness.



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Experiencing Awe

Introduction

This exercise involves tapping into the emotional experience of awe. Awe occurs in response to experiences that we perceive to be vast and amazing. This sense of vastness can be physical, such as a sun setting across the ocean, or psychological, such as a brilliant idea. Simply put, an awe-inspiring moment is a moment that made you say “wow!”

Step 1: Recall a recent awe experience

Think back to a time when you felt a sense of awe regarding something you saw or experienced. Perhaps you witnessed something special in nature, observed an overwhelming act of kindness, or had a critical lightbulb moment. For this exercise, try to think of the most recent experience you’ve had that involved the feeling of awe. Allow yourself to relive this moment of awe by closing your eyes for a few minutes and remembering as much about the experience as you can.

Step 2: Describe the awe experience

In the space below, describe this experience (Step 1) in as much detail as possible, including what thoughts went through your mind at that moment and what feelings and emotions arose at the time. Include any positive thoughts and/or feelings that have shown up now as you have relived this excellent experience as well.

Optional Step 3: Create an awe diary

As you may have just experienced (Steps 1 and 2), reliving awe moments allows us to re-experience some of the positivity that they initially evoked in us. Taking a moment to document awe moments not only allows you to savor and enjoy the experience for a little longer, but it also allows you to store the memory so that you can recall and re-enjoy the awe in the future. As an optional next step, begin to diarize moments of awe by describing and reflecting on them in your ‘awe diary’ (see the Appendix).

Fostering Admiration in Couples

Relationships

Exercise

15 min

Couple

Yes

The early stages of a romantic relationship, commonly known as the “honeymoon phase,” are characterized by all-consuming attraction, obsessive infatuation, and a strong desire for reciprocation. While the honeymoon phase feels great, unfortunately, it tends to expire after about two years, as partners begin to notice and react to small irritations and disappointments more than to positive behaviors. Couples begin to see the relationship in a more realistic light; the warning signs they ignored early on begin to emerge as subtle but persistent seeds of contempt. At this time, the real work of love begins (Meunier & Baker, 2012).

According to the sound relationship house theory (Gottman, Gottman, & DeClaire, 2007; Gottman & Silver, 2015), maintaining fondness and admiration within a relationship is the antidote for contempt and prevents the loss of respect or empathy towards one another. Maintaining fondness and admiration involves looking out for positive qualities in one’s partner and actively showing appreciation and admiration for these qualities, cultivating and maintaining internal positive thoughts and perceptions about each other, expressing positive thoughts and feelings of one’s partner and the relationship as a whole, and making an effort to express specific, recent, and timely praise rather than global or general admiration (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Research has shown that the regular expression of love and admiration in a relationship predicts long-term commitment (Sharlin et al., 2000). Further, couples who admire each other are more likely to accept and celebrate their differences and enjoy the diverse interests and opinions they offer to each other (Gottman, Gottman, & DeClaire, 2007). Furthermore, couples who make an effort to express fondness and admiration have been shown to experience a ‘build-up’ of positivity over time, leading to a longevity bonus of about 10 years (Fredrickson, 2009).

This tool is designed to help couples cultivate and express fondness and appreciation for one another to improve relationship satisfaction.



Author

This tool was adapted from Gottman and Silver’s exercise (seen in their 2015 book ‘The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work’) by Lucinda Poole and Hugo Alberts.



Goal

This tool aims to help couples foster feelings of fondness and admiration for one another and teach them to express these positive feelings within the relationship.



Advice

- This tool can be completed with couples or individually by referring to one's partner. When using the exercise with a couple, steps 1-4 and step 6 are completed individually and simultaneously while step 5 is completed by couples together. When only one person from the couple is present, complete this exercise by working through the steps with the client and then invite the client to take the exercise home and give it to his or her partner to complete as well.
- This tool can be used for couples who are in stable and happy relationships as well as couples in trouble. For thriving couples, this exercise is an excellent way to heighten the romance.
- Encourage couples to continue to share fondness and appreciation for one another after they complete the exercise as part of their everyday vocabulary (e.g., for making the bed, for listening, for sharing your positivity). Inform clients that showing appreciation is primarily about saying "thank you" beyond "what you do for me" and into "what you mean to me."



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Fostering Admiration in Couples

This exercise is all about fostering feelings of fondness and admiration for your partner. Did you know that positive feelings that have long been forgotten can be revived simply by thinking and talking about them? Doing so not only strengthens the bond and connection between you and your partner but also makes it much easier to address problem areas and move toward positive change. The first step is to come up with a few things that you appreciate about your partner. Second, we will do a brief meditation to allow feelings of fondness for these admirable characteristics to emerge. Third, you will share and celebrate with your partner what it is that you each cherish about one another.

Step 1: Identify admirable qualities

Come up with **three** qualities or characteristics that you appreciate or admire about your partner. For instance, you might appreciate that your partner is loving, generous, and a good friend. Once you have come up with three characteristics, write them down in your Relationship Journal under 'My partner's admirable qualities' (Appendix A).

If you are having difficulty coming up with three characteristics, feel free to define the word characteristic very loosely; even if you can recall only one occasion when your partner displayed this quality, write it down. If you are having trouble finding the words to describe your partner's characteristics, please see Appendix B, which has a list of 71 common admirable characteristics.

Step 2: Meditate on identified characteristics

Take a moment now to think about a time (in the past week) when your partner demonstrated one of these characteristics. Close your eyes and bring this memory to mind, allowing as many relevant details to emerge as possible, such as where you and your partner were, what your partner was saying and how he or she was saying it, how your partner was behaving, what was his or her facial expression, how anyone else who was there reacted to partner, and so on. Allow yourself to spend at least 3 minutes here with this memory in mind. While you are here, allow any pleasant feelings, such as fondness, admiration, and love, to emerge within you.

Step 3: Write down memory

After 3 minutes or so, open your eyes and jot down what came to your mind in the relevant space in your relationship journal (i.e., under the heading 'Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 1').



Step 4: Repeat previous steps

Repeat steps 2 and 3 on the two other qualities identified in step 1.

Step 5: Express appreciation

Come together with your partner now and share the three things that you appreciate about him or her, including your memory of when, in the past week, your partner displayed these qualities. You might like to use the following sentence structure to guide this discussion: "I appreciate that you are _____. I noticed it last week when _____." Take your time here, as this is a very personal and intimate connection activity and can be profoundly enjoyable and gratifying for each of you.

Step 6: Reflect

Now take a moment to reflect on the following individually (i.e., on your own):

- What feelings and emotions did this exercise bring up for you? For instance, did you experience feelings of love, contentment, admiration, or fondness?
- After completing this exercise, are you feeling more or less appreciative of your partner?
- Can you think of any other things that you admire or appreciate about your partner?

Appendix A: Relationship Journal

(Three of) My partner's admirable qualities

1.

2.

3.

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 1:

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 2:

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 3:

Appendix B: List of admirable characteristics

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Loving | 25. Cheerful | 49. Nurturing |
| 2. Sensitive | 26. Coordinated | 50. Warm |
| 3. Brave | 27. Graceful | 51. Virile |
| 4. Intelligent | 28. Elegant | 52. Kind |
| 5. Thoughtful | 29. Gracious | 53. Gentle |
| 6. Generous | 30. Playful | 54. Practical |
| 7. Loyal | 31. Caring | 55. Lusty |
| 8. Truthful | 32. A great friend | 56. Witty |
| 9. Strong | 33. Exciting | 57. Relaxed |
| 10. Energetic | 34. Thrifty | 58. Beautiful |
| 11. Sexy | 35. Full of plans | 59. Handsome |
| 12. Decisive | 36. Shy | 60. Calm |
| 13. Creative | 37. Vulnerable | 61. Lively |
| 14. Imaginative | 38. Committed | 62. A great partner |
| 15. Fun | 39. Involved | 63. A great parent |
| 16. Attractive | 40. Expressive | 64. Assertive |
| 17. Interesting | 41. Active | 65. Protective |
| 18. Supportive | 42. Careful | 66. Sweet |
| 19. Funny | 43. Reserved | 67. Tender |
| 20. Considerate | 44. Adventurous | 68. Powerful |
| 21. Affectionate | 45. Receptive | 69. Flexible |
| 22. Organized | 46. Reliable | 70. Understanding |
| 23. Resourceful | 47. Responsible | 71. Totally silly |
| 24. Athletic | 48. Dependable | |