
How to write a gratitude letter

ONE PERSON, ONE LETTER, ONE VISIT

1 Choose one person

Someone who did something for you that you never properly thanked them for: a relative, a teacher, a friend, a colleague. It helps to pick a person you could see, call or video chat in the next few weeks.

2 Plan before you write

Use the next page. Name one thing they did, the moment you remember it by, what it changed for you, and where you are now because of it. Specific beats general every time: a sentence they said is worth more than a paragraph of praise.

3 Write it to them

Start with “Dear” and their name, and write as if they are reading over your shoulder. Do not worry about spelling or grammar. Most letters land between half a page and a full page.

4 Close plainly

Say thank you in your own words and sign it. No summary, no lesson, no request. The letter is complete when they know what they did and that it mattered.

5 Deliver it if you can

Read it aloud in person, then leave the letter with them. If distance is the problem, read it on a call. Posting it works too; reading it to them is the version the research tested.

Based on the Gratitude Letter practice published by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley (ggia.berkeley.edu), which describes the letter, the visit and the research behind them.

What to leave out

- An apology for not writing sooner. One line at most, then move on.
- A list of everything they ever did. One act, told well, does more.
- Any request, news or favor. It turns the letter into a different letter.

Plan your letter

DATE _____

TO

.....

WHAT THEY DID (ONE SPECIFIC THING)

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.....

THE MOMENT I REMEMBER IT BY

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WHAT IT CHANGED FOR ME

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WHERE I AM NOW BECAUSE OF IT

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.....

.....

HOW I WILL DELIVER IT, AND WHEN

.....

.....

☐ IN PERSON

☐ PHONE OR VIDEO

☐ BY POST

A gratitude letter

DATE _____

DEAR

WITH GRATITUDE,

An example letter

A MADE-UP LETTER, ANNOTATED: WHAT EACH PART DOES

Dear Mrs. Okafor,

I have meant to write this for eleven years, so I am going to start with the afternoon I remember best. I was fourteen and had walked out of the spring recital halfway through my piece. You found me outside the hall and did not tell me it was fine. You said, “You stopped. That is not the same as failing,” and you made me book the hall for the next Saturday.

What they did, and the moment

I played the whole piece to an empty room that Saturday, with you in the back row. Nobody else ever knew about it, and it is still the performance I am proudest of.

One concrete memory

I did not become a pianist. I became a nurse, and on the bad shifts I hear that sentence in your voice. When a student freezes in front of a patient, I say it to them, and I make them go back in.

What it changed

I teach new nurses now. Every one of them has met you without knowing your name. Thank you for not letting me walk away from that piece.

Where they are now

With gratitude,
Daniel

A SHORT ONE WORKS TOO

Dear Mr. Haddad,

In ninth grade you kept me back after class to say my essay on the bridge collapse was the best in the set, and then you showed me exactly why the last page was weak. Nobody had ever been that honest with me and that kind at the same time.

A teacher, in three lines

I edit a trade magazine now. I still read every last page twice. Thank you.
Priya

Opening lines

IF THE FIRST SENTENCE IS THE HARD PART, BORROW ONE

A PARENT

I have never told you this properly, so I am writing it down: the thing I think about most is the year you ...

A TEACHER

You probably do not remember me, but I was in your class in ..., and one thing you said that year changed what I did next.

A FRIEND

We do not say this kind of thing to each other, so I am going to write it instead. When ... happened, you were the one who ...

A MENTOR OR BOSS

I am writing because something you did for me in ... is still paying off, and you deserve to know where it went.

A PARTNER

Not the big things this time. I want to thank you for one ordinary thing you do that I have never once mentioned: ...

SOMEONE YOU LOST TOUCH WITH

It has been a long time, and you may wonder why I am writing. It is to say thank you for ...

Closing lines

I do not think I have ever said this out loud, so: thank you.

You do not need to reply. I just wanted you to know.

I think about it more than you would guess. Thank you for it.