



# reCAPS

**Counseling & Psychological Services**  
**University of California, Santa Cruz**

## Focus on the Positive: How a Gratitude Practice Can Make You Feel Good

Most of us think too much about what goes wrong or what is “wrong with” us and not enough about what goes right in our lives or what we *like* about ourselves. Of course, sometimes it makes sense to analyze “bad” events or reflect on our less ideal behaviors and patterns so that we can increase our insights and awareness and avoid the same mistakes in the future. However, when we spend more time thinking about what is bad in life than what is good or helpful, we can set ourselves up for anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. One way to keep this from happening

is to get better at thinking about and savoring what went well and what we like about ourselves.

According to psychologist and founder of Positive Psychology, Martin Seligman, there are evolutionary reasons that most of us are not nearly as good at dwelling on good events as we are at analyzing bad ones. Those of our ancestors who spent a lot of time basking in the sunshine of good events when they should have been preparing for disaster did not survive the Ice Age. Predicting problems and preparing for them is adaptive. However, our brains can fixate on the negative and get into a

thought loop that is not productive in solving problems or understanding mistakes but rather just keeps us feeling bad. So, to overcome our brains’ natural catastrophic bent, we need to work on and practice the skill of thinking about the positive. The key word here is *practice*—it takes time and repetition to create a new habit.

One way to do this is to start a “gratitude practice,” a regular habit of reflecting on things in our lives (and in ourselves) for which we feel grateful. Following is one way to start a gratitude practice of your own.

Every night (or morning) for the next week, set aside 10 minutes. Write down three things that went well that day and why they went well. Alternatively, write three things you like and appreciate about yourself and why they are important. You may use a journal, your computer or tablet, or just a simple notepad to



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### All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year 'round:

- Helpful workshops and trainings around campus
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services (in person Mon-Fri 8 am-5 pm; by phone 24/7 at 831-459-2628)

To make an appointment, call 831-459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!

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write about the events, but it is important that you have a physical record of what you wrote as part of the practice. The three things need not be earthshaking in importance (“I worked hard on that assignment,” “The sunset was really pretty,” “My friend laughed at a joke I made”), but they can be more important things, too (“My sister just gave birth to a healthy baby,” “I got into graduate school,” “I was really there for my best friend when he needed me today”).

Next to each positive event or quality, answer the question, “Why did this happen?” or “What’s important about this?” For example, if you wrote that your roommate bought you ice cream, you could write “This happened because my roommate and I are friends.” Or if you wrote that you got to visit your parents, you might write “It’s important because my family matters to me.” If you wrote “I was there for my friend when he needed me,” you might write “It’s important because one of my values is being caring and helping friends.”

Writing about why the events happened or why positive things

matter may seem awkward at first, but stick with it for one week. It will get easier. You may not see dramatic results right away, but if you continue this practice after trying it out the first week, you’ll see your mind gradually having a much easier time focusing on and holding on to positive thoughts.

It’s also important to note that you don’t have to already *feel* grateful to start the gratitude practice. One of the symptoms of being overly stressed out or depressed is that things that used to feel good to you can feel “flat” or empty. So, at first, you may be *thinking* about gratitude more than actually *feeling* it. That’s OK—with continued practice, the feelings will start to get stronger.

If you want to add a little variety to your gratitude practice, here are a few additional exercises to try:

1. Put photos, drawings, or quotes around your room that remind you of things for which you are grateful.
2. Write a letter expressing gratitude to someone who has made a difference in your life, then visit the person or call them to read the letter to them.
3. Incorporate gratitude into exercise: When you are running or at the gym, notice things around you for which you could be grateful, such as a song you like, a pretty tree, a warm day. You could also focus on good things about yourself, such as “I am strong enough to work out” or “I am doing something good for my body by exercising.”
4. Say “thank you” more often, and you could even consider sending hand-written thank-you notes or emails to people for whom you feel grateful. For example, you could write “Thanks for talking to me last week when I felt down” to a friend or “Thanks for your great sense of humor” to your sister.
5. Acknowledge one “ungrateful” thought a day (e.g., “Being in school sucks” or “Why couldn’t I get as good a grade on my exam as X?”) and work on transforming it into a grateful thought (e.g., “School is tough sometimes, but I am grateful I have the opportunity to be in college,” “I am grateful that I passed the exam—I don’t need to compare my score to anyone else’s score”).

## Top Study Tips for Finals

Need some tips studying for finals? Read [this](#) article to get 25 helpful and practical ways to prepare yourself. But, in case you don’t have time to read all 25, here are CAPS’ favorite 5:

1. Just get started—don’t wait until you feel like studying to begin.
2. Create a master to-do list and schedule with everything you need to get done before finals, and break

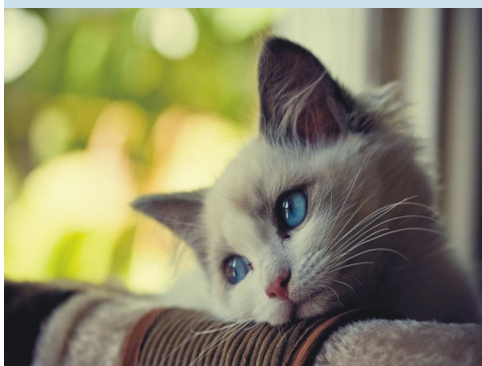
it into smaller sub-tasks.

3. Reward yourself for getting study sub-tasks done.
4. Stay healthy—get sleep, eat well, and avoid too much caffeine.
5. Study in a distraction-free zone: Find a quiet place, and turn off your phone.

## Dear CAPS,

*I've been feeling down—what can I do to feel better?*

—In the Dumps



You're not alone—many people feel down at times. Stress or difficult life events can cause us to have a bad day—or even a bad week. When you feel down almost all day every day for two weeks or longer with changes in sleep and appetite, you may have depression. If so, it's important to talk to a mental health professional (such as us at CAPS), especially if you are having thoughts about hurting or killing yourself.

Whether you are stressed out, temporarily down, or clinically depressed, there are some things you can do to feel better. Here are a few suggestions.

### Stay Social

Even if you don't feel much like interacting, being around others can boost your mood. Having someone to listen or to spend time with can make a difference. Even being in a study group can help you feel less isolated. Volunteering can connect you with people and also make you feel good about helping others. However, don't overdo it if being around people is too draining. Try to find the right balance for yourself.

### Move Your Body

Regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress and boost mood. Yeah, it can be hard to motivate yourself to exercise or fit it into your schedule, but even some short bursts of aerobic exercise can help. What's more, research shows that students who take breaks from studying to exercise are more productive than those who just study nonstop.

### Plan for the Positive

*Schedule* time for socializing, fun activities, and self-care (e.g., exercise, relaxation time, meals). Ensuring that you have some rejuvenating things planned into your day is just as important as scheduling your study time and other responsibilities.

### Laugh

Humor can be a great antidote for the blues. See a funny movie, talk to a friend who makes you laugh, or watch silly YouTube videos.

### Express Your Feelings

Find ways to acknowledge and express your feelings, such as journaling, doing artwork, or talking to a friend or mentor. Just remember that talking *too much* about your problems without looking at the positive can be counter-productive.

### Be Grateful

Finding ways to focus on things you're grateful for rather than on worries and problems can boost your mood. See page 1 for some ideas about starting a gratitude practice.

## Upcoming Events

**LET'S TALK:** Drop in to have a brief, confidential chat with a CAPS counselor. Held when school is in session but not during finals week. Let's Talk is held 2:00 to 4:00 pm on Tuesdays at the Cantu Center and 12:30 to 2:30 pm on Wednesdays at the Graduate Student Commons, Room 208. The day and time has changed for the new Let's Talk at the Cove recovery space at Kresge (Building 393, Suite 153): It is now being held Thursdays from 1 to 2 pm. All registered UCSC students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. Let's Talk is not set up to handle crises—if you are experiencing a mental health crisis, go to the CAPS main office during business hours or call CAPS at 831-45-2628 any time. Read more about Let's Talk on the CAPS [website](#).

**WELLNESS SERIES:** These weekly hour-long workshops are designed to give you helpful info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thought patterns, and time management/avoiding procrastination. Workshops are held at CAPS on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 pm. They are free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! The last one of the winter quarter is happening March 9th. Check our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page or call CAPS at 831-459-2628 to find out the schedule for spring quarter.



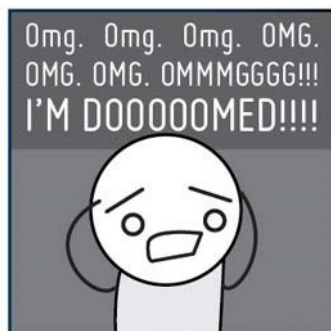
— A FIELD GUIDE TO —  
**PROCRASTINATORS**

**Contact CAPS:**

Student Health Center  
 East Wing, 2nd Floor  
 Phone: 831-459-2628  
 (24/7 crisis help)  
<http://caps.ucsc.edu>



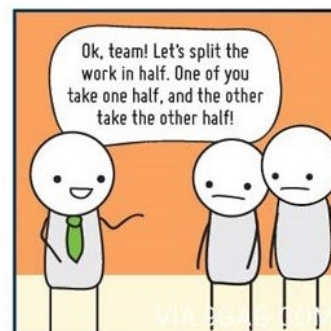
The Cleaner



The Panicker



The Watcher



The Delegator



The Napper



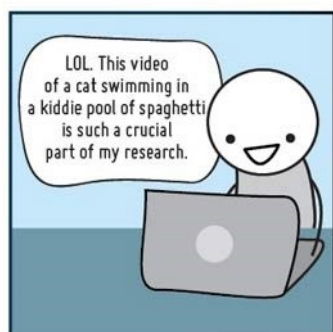
The Sidetracker



The Gamer



The Social Sharer



The Internet Researcher



The Snacker



The List Maker



The Perpetuator