

# Be thankful to be joyful: Gratitude writing for wellbeing

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## Background

- There is some evidence that writing a letter of gratitude can enhance wellbeing<sup>1</sup>.
- A recent review concluded that “The literature on the impact of gratitude interventions on psychological wellbeing remains scant, fragmented, and inconclusive”<sup>2</sup>.
- There has been limited exploration of the moderating role of individual differences. Anecdotally, people with lower life satisfaction may struggle with writing letters of gratitude, and therefore might not experience any wellbeing benefits from this activity.

## Aim and hypothesis

- The first aim was to investigate the influence of writing a gratitude letter on changes in positive and negative affect, relative to a neutral letter writing control condition. It was hypothesised that gratitude letter writing would increase positive mood and decrease negative mood relative to writing a neutral letter.
- The second aim was to investigate the moderating role of life satisfaction. This research question was **exploratory**, thus no *a priori* hypothesis was established.

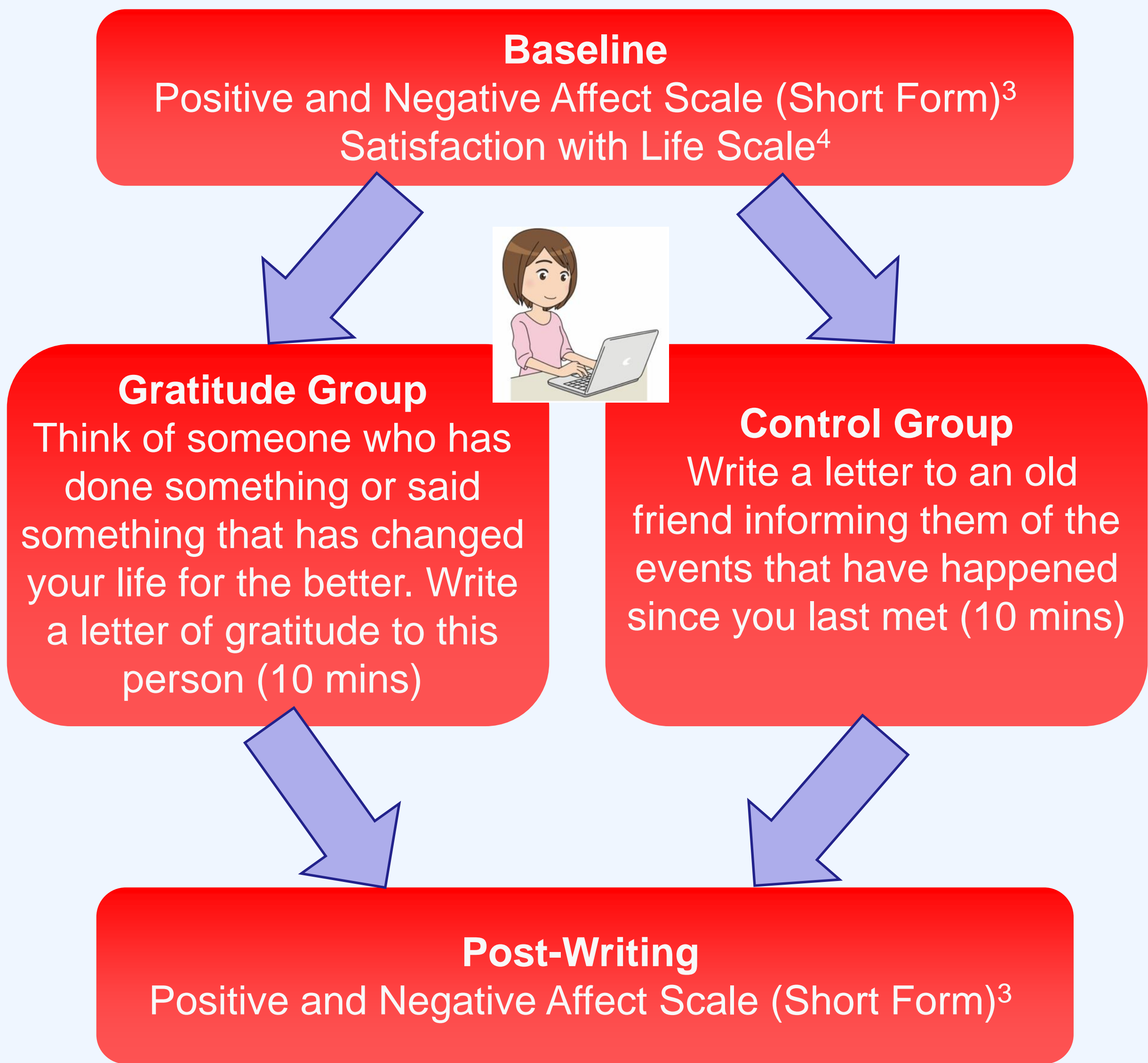
## Method

### Participants

102 participants consented to take part. A full set of data was obtained from 57 participants for analysis:

	Gratitude Writing	Control Writing
N (females)	28 (23)	29 (23)
Mean age (SD)	40.2 (15.9)	39.0 (13.9)

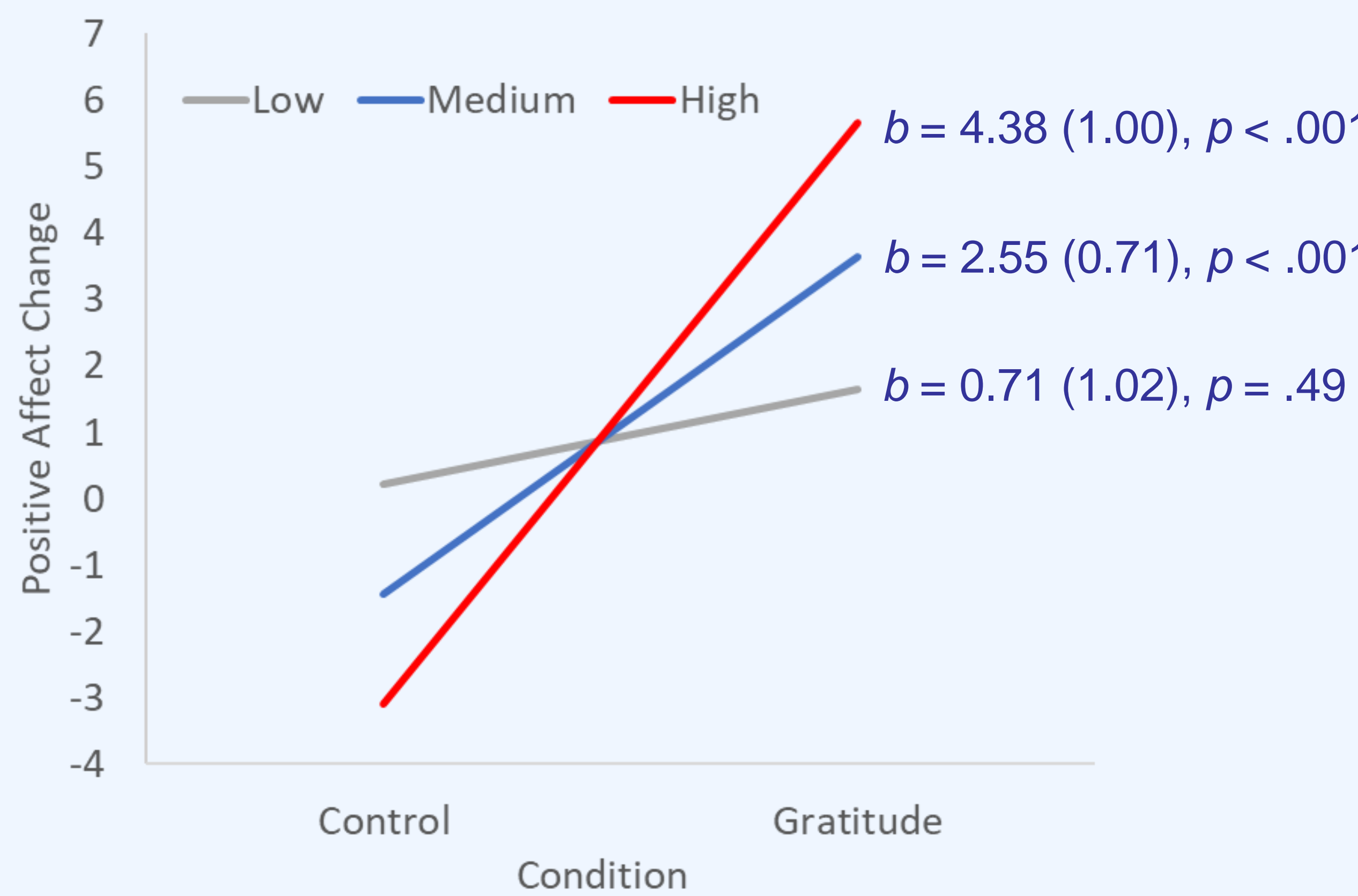
### Procedure



## Results

### Positive Affect

- There was a significant effect of condition ( $B = 2.54$ ,  $SE = 0.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that there was a significantly greater increase in positive affect scores between pre- and post-writing for the gratitude condition, relative to the control condition.
- This effect was significantly moderated by life satisfaction ( $B = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .014$ ). The effect was evident in participants with moderate and high levels of life satisfaction, but not with participants with low levels of life satisfaction.



### Negative affect

- There was no significant effect of condition ( $B = -0.45$ ,  $SE = 0.68$ ,  $p = .515$ ).

## Conclusions and Future Directions

- Writing a gratitude letter increased positive affect relative to writing a neutral letter.
- This effect held only for participants with moderate and high levels of life satisfaction.
- There were no effects of gratitude writing on negative affect.
- Possible ‘demand characteristics’: Participants were told about the benefits of gratitude writing upfront.
- **Confirmatory study ongoing**, with **pre-registered hypotheses** aiming to **replicate effects** and reduce demand characteristics.
- Future work to investigate the longevity of the effect – for how long do the benefits persist?

## References

<sup>1</sup>Toepfer, S., & Walker, K. (2009). Letters of Gratitude: Improving well-being through expressive writing. *Journal Of Writing Research*, 1, 181-198.

<sup>2</sup>Jans-Beken, L., et al. (2020). Gratitude and health: An updated review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, 743-782.

<sup>3</sup>Watson, D., et al. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 1063.

<sup>4</sup>Diener, E., et al. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.