

Activity Overview

Title: Remembering, Rewriting, and Rejoicing: Reflecting on the Past to Inspire Hope for the Future

Target Virtue: Hope

Target Courses or Activities / Criteria: Professional development courses or exploratory courses with students who have undeclared majors.

Summary: Expressing gratitude for past fulfilled hopes through a writing exercise improves current state-level happiness and optimism for future events.

Key virtue outcomes: Witvliet et al. (2018) observed an increase in current feelings of hopefulness and happiness when comparing pre- and post-intervention scores.

Citation: Witvliet, C.V.O., Richie, F. J., Root Luna, L. M., & Van Tongeren, D. R. (2018). Gratitude predicts hope and happiness: A two-study assessment of traits and states. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(3), 271–282.

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This activity was collated by [Harry Georges](#) and edited by [Jesse Blaire](#).



Remembering, Rewriting, and Rejoicing: Reflecting on the Past to Inspire Hope for the Future

In this brief writing exercise, students are challenged to reflect on past hopes that were fulfilled to bolster optimism for future outcomes of current hopes.

Before You Start: Consider having your students complete the [Defining Hope quiz and reflection](#) before completing this activity. It may also be helpful to provide students with [this infographic](#) about what virtues are and why they matter.

Materials: A writing utensil and paper, or a computer and word processor.

Implementation Suggestions: This activity can be especially powerful when implemented after discouraging moments, such as receiving lower-than-expected exam results.

Procedure:

Students are prompted to reflect and elaborate on a past hope that was fulfilled. Students should aim for a word count of at least 300 words and address the following writing prompts:

1. Describe a past hope that you had which came true.
2. Write about what you learned from having this past hope fulfilled.
3. Describe the motivation you had to bring about the fulfillment of this past hope.
4. Write about the steps you took that contributed to the positive fulfillment of this hope.
5. Reflect on how relationships with others played a role in experiencing its fulfillment.
6. Write about your spiritual growth through the experience of having this past hope fulfilled.
7. Describe how your strengths and virtues grew in the process of hoping and seeing that hope fulfilled.
8. As you reflect on this past fulfilled hope, identify and name what you are grateful for and to whom you are grateful.

Extensions:

At [CultivateCharacter.com](https://cultivatecharacter.com) our approach to virtue cultivation is grounded in the belief that when students encounter virtue content through multiple modalities, it is more likely to stick. Below are potential extensions of the empirically-grounded virtue activities described above to help stretch your assignments and enhance the likelihood that your classroom cultivates character.

Possible Extensions:

Environmental – Encourage students to sketch a visual symbol or image that represents their past fulfilled hope (e.g., a star, a path, a tree). Ask them to post their visual work in a visible space in their environment. Each time they see it, they will be reminded of their fulfilled hope.

Cognitive – Prompt students to analyze their past experience with these questions: "What strategies, actions, or mindsets helped you achieve your past hope?" Followed by, "Are there patterns you notice that could help with your current hope?" This allows students to translate past positive actions and beliefs to promote active hope for future goals

Behavioral – Encourage students to take actionable steps towards their goals. Have students visualize and "shadow practice" their goals if applicable, especially ahead of anticipated performances. They can also take action on the steps outlined in the cognitive extension.

Affective/Somatic – Have students imagine and replicate the emotions they would feel as they are realizing their goal. For example, a student might need to take the GRE to enroll in their desired graduate program. They can try to imagine and replicate the emotions and physical sensations they might feel upon receiving a positive test score.

Motivations – Remind students how this writing exercise directly applies to helping them reach their goals.