Receiving a simple thank-you note can really make someone's day
By Austin American-Statesman, adapted by Newsela staff
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It might seem like a good idea to write a thank-you note. Your parents might have told you to write a note or letter of gratitude, but how many of us actually sit down to do that?

Amit Kumar is an assistant professor at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas, in Austin. He reminds us why thank-you notes and other expressions of gratitude are important. Kumar and Nicholas Epley at the University of Chicago, in Illinois, conducted several experiments on thank-you notes.

They wanted to see what the hesitation is about sending thank-you notes to people and what the reaction is for the person who receives it. Their findings are published in the journal Psychological Science.

"One thing that occurred to us is expressing gratitude improves well-being," Kumar says. "And yet people don't seem to walk around giving thanks to people quite often," he says.

Kumar and Epley asked their students to each write a letter of gratitude to another person. Then they questioned both the writer and the recipient about that letter and how it made them feel. Most of the students sent the letter by email. The researchers then contacted the recipients and asked about receiving the letter.

**Formal Wording Isn't Important**

What they found was that writing the letter was a positive experience for the writer. It improved their mood directly afterward.

The writers didn't think it would have that much of an effect on the person receiving their letter. They underestimated how much surprise the recipient would feel getting the letter and how much it would improve the recipient's mood. The writers thought it would be awkward for the recipient to receive a letter of gratitude, but the recipients reported that awkwardness much less.

The writers worried about what to say and how to say it. However, Kumar says, the recipients didn't really place a high value on formal rules or the wording.
"They feel extremely positive when they were on the receiving end of these expressions," he says. "They don't really feel awkward at all."

The writers were worried, thinking things like, "Am I going to find the right words?"

**Recipients Feel The Warmth**

"When you are a recipient, you focus on the warmth of the intent," Kumar says. The recipients considered the feelings behind the letters, he says. "How heartfelt was it? How friendly and warm?"

The writers, on the other hand, were overly concerned about the "correctness" of what they were writing.

If they knew what a positive effect it would have on this person, "they would do it more often," Kumar says.

Kumar says this study and others like it provide a reminder for people. They tell us that "simple, small changes in our everyday lives can make a big difference in how we treat other people and how we feel," he says.

"It's the sort of thing we should do more often," he says.

Directions: Use the information found in the article to identify the best response for each item.

**R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly**

1. According to the text, what affect does writing a thank-you letter have on the writer?
   - A. It makes the writer feel depressed.
   - B. The writer wants to call the recipient of the thank-you letter.
   - C. It improves the writer's mood.
   - D. The writers worry that the recipient will make fun of them for writing a thank-you letter.

**R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says implicitly**

2. What is the author's purpose for writing this article?
   - A. to compare and contrast studies at two different universities on why people worry about thank-you notes
   - B. to suggest that people should write heartfelt thank-you notes to everyone they have met in life
   - C. to indicate that recipients do feel a little strange about receiving thank-you notes, but it's okay
   - D. to show that thank-you notes have positive effects for writers and recipients, despite writers' worries

**R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases**

3. Read this paragraph from the section *Formal Wording Isn’t Important*:
   
   The writers didn't think it would have that much of an effect on the person receiving their letter. They underestimated how much surprise the recipient would feel getting the letter and how much it would improve the recipient's mood. The writers thought it would be awkward for the recipient to receive a letter of gratitude, but the recipients reported that awkwardness much less.

   What is the definition of the word *underestimated* as it is used in the above passage?
   - A. to be wrong about
   - B. to make a guess (such as for an amount of money)
   - C. to receive too much information at one time
   - D. not very important

**R2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text**

4. Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
   - A. Kumar and Epley asked their students to each write a letter of gratitude to another person.
   - B. The researchers then contacted the recipients and asked about receiving the letter.
   - C. What they found was that writing the letter was a positive experience for the writer.
   - D. The writers, on the other hand, were overly concerned about the "correctness" of what they were writing.