



# GRATITUDE IN GAMES



## RECOGNIZING THE GOOD IN LIFE AND ACKNOWLEDGING ITS SOURCE AS OUTSIDE YOURSELF.

Would you keep doing favors for a neighbor who never said thank you and never reciprocated? Probably not, unless you are extremely selfless. When we express gratitude, we assure others that we notice and will repay the sacrifices they make on our behalf. Showing gratitude strengthens our relationships, and feeling grateful also motivates us to be more giving. Grateful people tend to return kindness directly or to “pay it forward” to someone else. Of course, feelings of gratitude are not limited to only what other people do for us. We can also feel grateful for material comforts, natural beauty, or, depending on personal beliefs, a creator or spiritual force for good. Gratitude also can be a helpful coping strategy — appreciating what life’s difficulties have to teach us and “finding the silver lining” can build resilience. How would your game allow and encourage players to notice what’s good about their situation, acknowledge others’ role in that goodness, and show their gratitude?

### ELEMENTS TO ADD

- + Ways to express thanks (ex: text, emotes, gestures)
- + Requiring players to depend on NPCs or other players
- + Characters whose power comes from a good reputation built on qualities like kindness and gratitude
- + NPCs who help players whether they’ve “earned” it or not
- + Ways for players to repay kindness (ex: performing side quests, sharing collectibles or resources)
- + In social games, ways for players to publicly call out other helpful or generous players
- + Options to share (ex: via in-game screen captures) good things that happen
- + Narrative that highlights the role others played in players’ successes
- + “Strategic subtraction” of a character or ability the player has come to rely on (remove then bring it back)

### ELEMENTS TO LEAVE OUT

- Totally competitive, individualistic themes and ways to win. When players don’t have to rely on anyone or anything else, there are few opportunities to be grateful.
- Rewarding the expression of gratitude with some kind of in-game currency. This does not motivate genuine gratitude.
- No meaningful relationships to nurture.
- “Negative gratitude” (gratitude for others’ failures, or self-enhancement that comes through others’ misfortune) should be limited.

## GAME GENRES & TYPES



MMOs and MOBAs



Story



Cooperative Play



Multi-player Strategy



Action/Adventure



Social Stimulation

## SPECIFIC MECHANICAL REFERENCES

In the Sand Kingdom of *Super Mario Odyssey*, a lovable creature appears after the main story has been completed who helps Mario reach moons he couldn't previously get to. The players' need for help eventually turns into gratitude. However, there's no way to express that gratitude in this particular game.

In MMOs like *World of Warcraft*, players can express their thanks via chat when other real players help them through a battle, heal them, or share loot or tips. Players can also reciprocate that kindness when they meet other, less experienced players.

*Journey* and *Way* allow players to nonverbally communicate emotions like gratitude using gestures.

In *Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7*, players temporarily lose all the abilities they have worked so hard to gain in the first game and have to build them back up again. This "ability subtraction" can help players appreciate their abilities more once they return.

In *Nier Automata*, players are the recipients of other real players' genuine sacrifice; players can only win because other players who've come before them have given up something important. This can inspire both gratitude and reciprocation.

In cooperative games like *Journey*, *Never Alone*, *Brothers*, or *Overcooked*, players appreciate other players' or NPCs' unique abilities, benefit from others' kindness, and help each other succeed in a reciprocal way.

Games that depict tough circumstances like war and the loss of loved ones — like *This War of Mine* or *What Remains of Edith Finch* — can prompt players to reflect on the good in their lives that they may be taking for granted.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EMPATHY

Articles and videos at <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude>

Emmons, R. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Character Lab (2014). Dr. Robert Emmons of UC Davis talks about gratitude [Video.] Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/95882583>

Ahrens, A. H., & Forbes, C. N. (2016). Gratitude. In: M. M. Tugade, M. N. Shiota, B. L. Fredrickson, & L. D. Kirby (Eds.) *Handbook of positive emotions*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Emmons, R. A., & Mishra, A. (2012). Why gratitude enhances well-being: What we know, what we need to know. In Sheldon, K., Kashdan, T., & Steger, M.F. (Eds.) *Designing the future of positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward*. New York: Oxford University Press.