



Motivation & Your Beliefs

Beliefs directly influence the goals we set and our motivation for achieving them. Analyzing your beliefs about academics and school can be useful in generating the motivation you need to be a successful student.

Understanding your beliefs

Much of what we choose to do is determined by our underlying beliefs. You might be a math major because you believe you're good at math, or a journalism major because you believe you're good at writing. Even if the belief is based in fact (you really are good at math!), it's likely that your belief about that was influenced along the way. This handout discusses three categories of beliefs.

Self-efficacy beliefs

This is our perception about how good we are at a specific task. In general, it's easier to maintain motivation for something we think we're good at than for something we think we're not good at.

Enabling vs. self-sabotaging beliefs

Enabling beliefs motivate us, while self-sabotaging beliefs deter us. Students who practice enabling beliefs think their actions influence outcomes; students with self-sabotaging beliefs may feel their efforts will be

fruitless. When coupled with self-efficacy beliefs, however, this becomes complicated.

Attributional beliefs

Who—or what—do you attribute your successes and failures to? If it's yourself, you might think "I made a good grade because I studied hard." If it's the professor, you might believe "I didn't do well because the professor doesn't like me." If it's other circumstances, you might think "I only did well because I got lucky." Analyze the reasons for your successes and failures, and to take ownership of those reasons.

Examples

Beliefs come from a number of places—our own experiences, teachers/professors, family, and friends. Below, there are examples of how beliefs about academic performance can relate to each other. Where do your beliefs come from, and how do they influence your actions?

Whether you are/aren't good at a subject	Why you do/don't need to study	Why you did/didn't do well
I'm good at physics, so ...	I don't need to study at all because I'm naturally talented.	I made an A because I got lucky.
		I made an A because I put so much effort into studying.
	I need to start early because I want to reflect my knowledge and abilities on the test.	I failed because I didn't study enough.
		I failed because the professor used trick questions.
Whether you are/aren't good at a subject	Why you do/don't need to study	
I'm not good at physics, so ...	I don't need to study at all because it won't do any good anyway.	
	I need to start early. It takes me extra time to study for a challenging subject.	

Think of something you're "just not good" at

What is it?

Why do you think you feel this way? Did somebody tell you you're not good at the task? Did you make a bad grade? Anything else?

How will these beliefs influence you the next time do a related task? Will you try harder to be successful, or do you think you'll not try as hard?

Are your beliefs enabling or self-sabotaging? If so, how can you make them enabling?

What beliefs have to change to make this happen?