

# No evidence that grit improves performance, analysis finds

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There are many paths to success, but the significance of grit in helping you reach that goal has been greatly overstated, says an Iowa State University psychologist.

Marcus Credé, an assistant professor who studies techniques to improve [academic performance](#), and his colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of all prior research on grit. Their [results](#), to be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, found no evidence that grit is a good predictor of success. While some educators are working to enhance grit in students, Credé says there's no indication that it's possible to boost levels. And even if it was possible, it might not matter.

Grit is defined as perseverance and commitment to long-term goals. The research - often associated with University of Pennsylvania professor Angela Duckworth who first studied grit - is relatively new compared to the decades of work on performance indicators such as conscientiousness and intelligence. Credé says his team's analysis of 88 independent studies representing nearly 67,000 people shows that grit is really no different than conscientiousness.

"If you look at the questions on the grit measure, they're often almost identical to the questions that we ask when we measure conscientiousness. Many are almost word-for-word the same," Credé said. "It's really just a repackaging or relabeling of conscientiousness, which we've known about for over 50 years. It's perhaps a sexier title,

but it's nothing new."

## **Gross error in results**

The most well-known data source on grit is based on West Point cadets who complete basic training at the United States Military Academy. According to one paper describing these cadets, those with above-average levels of grit are 99 percent more likely to finish the training than cadets with average levels of grit. However, Credé says the original data were misinterpreted. His analysis shows the increase in likelihood is really closer to 3 percent, rather than 99 percent.

"It's a really basic error and the weird thing is that no one else has ever picked it up. People just read the work and said, 'It's this massive increase in people's performance and how likely they are to succeed.' But no one had ever looked at the numbers before," Credé said.

## **Don't invest in grit interventions**

Credé wants to make others aware of this error because many educators have bought into the concept of grit and are exploring ways to improve this trait. In the paper, Credé cited examples of schools that are training teachers to foster grit in students as well as school districts considering adding grit to the curriculum. A 2013 U.S. Department of Education report also recommended incorporating grit in school interventions.

Credé is not surprised by the growing interest in grit, because it's simple and relatable. If you think of someone who gives up easily compared to someone who sticks with it, even when it's hard, it seems to make sense that the one with more grit will succeed, he said. Credé added that people like the idea that grit is something they can do or change that can have a dramatic effect on their life.

"Nobody wants to hear that success in life is made up of many small factors that all add up. It's your education, it's how hard you work, it's your conscientious and creativity - all these little pieces that add up," Credé said. "We want to be told here's one big thing that explains everything."

But if educators want to improve [student academic performance](#), Credé says there are other more effective ways to accomplish that goal.

"If you're going to spend money on something, you need to figure out what really matters and if it is something we can shift. I think grit really fails in both of those," Credé said. "We know from other meta-analyses that variables such as adjustment, study habits and skills, test anxiety and class attendance are far more strongly related to performance than grit. We also know that we can help students adjust better, we can teach them how to study effectively, we can help them with their [test anxiety](#) and we can make them come to class through interventions. I'm not sure we can do that with grit."

Credé says there may be some value in separating the two components of grit - perseverance and consistency of interests - as a way to measure success. Perseverance was a stronger predictor of high school grade point average than overall grit scores. This component may hold promise for future research and in applied settings for intervention.

Provided by Iowa State University

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