



AP Psychology 2000 Student Samples

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An extrinsic motivator is a reward offered, in this case to the students, by someone else. It is not, say, doing well in school to learn things, it's doing well to get good grades. If grades are no longer used, the extrinsic motivator that they are for some students will be gone. The students who do well in school for the sole purpose of getting good grades will probably not try as hard as they did when grades were given. On the other hand, students who do well in school for the purpose of increasing their knowledge, regardless of grades, will keep doing what they're doing. For a few of these students, though, the intrinsic motivator of knowledge has been replaced by the extrinsic motivator of grades at some point in the past. They, like the first group, will probably stop trying in school, because knowledge will probably not return as an intrinsic motivator. (in this case)

The Yerkes-Dodson Law states that the higher the emotional arousal on a well-learned task, the better it is performed. If the task is not well-learned, it will be performed more poorly as arousal increases.

By the end of the semester, by exam time, if grades aren't hanging over students' heads, their arousal will be lower than if grades were used. So, because their classwork will be well-learned by then, their performance will decrease without the grades. For the few that never learned the material the first time, though, their performance will increase without grades because the tasks will not be well-learned. (hopefull!)

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Learned helplessness happens when no matter what an organism does, it cannot escape a punishment. With Seligman's research, it was dogs and shocks. When the dogs couldn't escape the shocks the first few times, they would not jump a short barrier to escape them later. Similarly, when the students, no matter what they do, cannot raise their grades, they ~~become~~ stop trying to raise them. This is learned helplessness. If grades weren't given, a few students would ~~no longer~~ no longer be punished with bad grades no matter how hard they tried. They would not learn helplessness, so they'd keep trying in every class to do their best. Some students, though, who formerly tried hard and received good grades, would stop trying hard because now, no matter how hard they try, they don't see any results. Some would learn helplessness and some would no longer learn it.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is when someone expects something of someone else, the expectation itself may bring about ^{the behavior} ~~what~~ they expect. Teachers who formerly saw certain students' bad grades would no longer see them. If they thought the kids who had bad grades would do poorly in their class too, they may have formerly made that behavior happen (probably unconsciously). If there are no grades, no such expectations occur, and students will try harder because there will be no more self-fulfilling prophecies.

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Although some methods of teaching, such as the Montessori method, do not use grades to evaluate students, many psychological factors prevent the system from being successful. Since these high schoolers are accustomed to the grades system in my high school, these psychological factors will for the most part prevent the no grades system from working.

One of these factors is motivation. A person's motivation can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is caused by outside factors, being used as rewards, while intrinsic motivation is a drive from within to do something. For years these high schoolers have been extrinsically motivated to perform well through grades. Learning the information covered in an exam results in a good grade. Without grades, students will have to intrinsically motivate themselves to work hard, which will be difficult for them to do after the many years they were motivated by something tangible, like a grade, instead of simply the satisfaction of learning something new.

Another potential drawback to the no-grades system is shown through the arousal theory. For many adolescents, school is not a top priority so something must be used to arouse them to work. Depending on the new system of evaluation, these students may not put forth such an effort because nothing is arousing them and causing them to work. If the system is simply pass or fail then the students might feel there is no need to try more than the bare minimum, if, at all.

The idea of learned helplessness both supports and denies the usefulness of the no grades system. Learned helplessness can best be shown through Seligman's dog experiment. Seligman put dogs in harnesses they could not escape from and then electrically shocked them. At first the dogs attempted to escape,

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but after many shocks the dogs no longer put forth effort. Then, the harness was removed, and even though the dogs could escape they did not even try because they thought they were helpless and unable to change the outcome of the situation. Not to say that ~~animals~~ ^{students} are dogs, but the theory still applies. Many students study constantly, yet still do not do well. After a while they develop learned helplessness, and no longer put forth any effort. On the other hand, some students might respond the same way with the no grades policy. If they work hard and then are evaluated as being on the same level as someone who did half as much work, they are not going to put forth the extra effort anymore.

There is one factor that whole heartedly supports the no grades policy and that is the self-fulfilling prophecy. This concept suggests that if a person is told they are stupid, then their performance level will decrease because they believe what they are told. These students who may be very bright might not get the best grades, so they will think of themselves as dumb. Without grades, they will not be influenced in that way and can work to their potential.

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Extrinsic Motivation - is when an external reward, such as money or school grades in this case, motivates a person to do something. Since no rewards would be given for excellent school work, a person who is extrinsically motivated is not likely to do well. On the other hand, an intrinsically motivated person ~~would~~ would prosper because they would only need internal motivation, which is provided. Such a system would hurt extrinsically motivated people.

Arousal theory - says that things ^{and actions} that cause arousal are likely to be continued or repeated. Since no grades are given, behavior would be negatively affected.

Learned Helplessness - is a person's feeling that they have no control over ~~control~~ the outcomes of their behavior. They feel that their actions have no impact on the environment and their ~~current~~ current situation. Learned Helplessness may arise from a lack of feedback or responses to their behavior. If the students at this high school ~~are~~ have no idea how they are performing and if they see students who do less work than them, they may start to feel as if they cannot do anything about their grades and their future. They may stop trying as hard on their schoolwork. Therefore, learned helplessness would negatively affect their behavior.

Self-fulfilling prophecy - is when a person's thoughts and worries ultimately dictate the outcome. For instance, if a teacher believes a handicapped student in her class is not going to do good, these thoughts may make her give that student less chances ~~for~~ to succeed. Since this student did not get the ~~the~~ proper treatment, he will not do good in the class. Hence, the teacher confirmed her beliefs when her actions dictated the success of the student. At this high school, similar

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Situations may occur. Students who do not believe that they can do good in school ~~may~~ will have more reinforcement from grades to show that they can. They may stop trying, which would cause them not to do good in school. Also, teachers may not teach as good because they may believe that their teaching has no effect on student performance. There could be no grades to ~~refute~~ refute this. Therefore, self-fulfilling prophecies could negatively affect student performance.