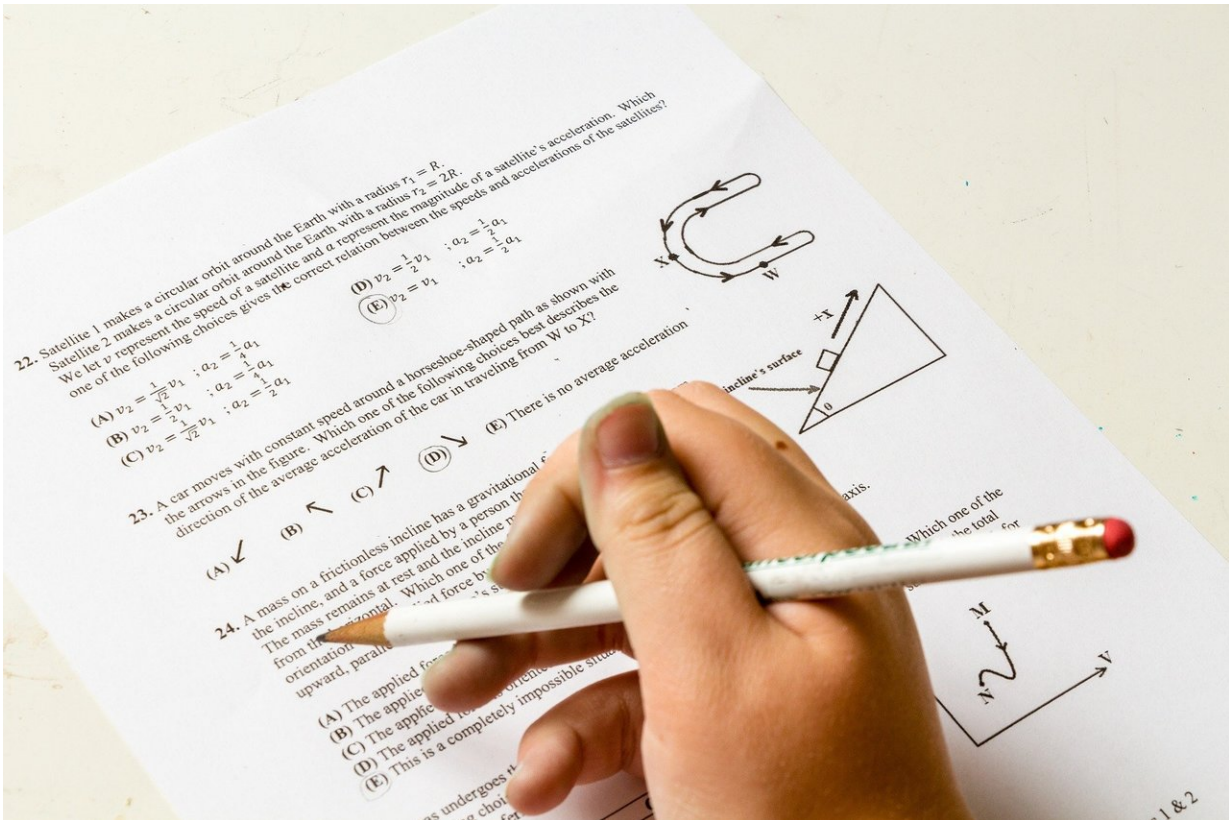


# How expectations impact actual exam scores

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Confidence in good results is related to academic progress, as confirmed by the results of a study conducted by researchers from the Higher School of Economics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Tinbergen Institute.

The study focused on nearly 600 second-year students who studied at the HSE International College of Economics and Finance (ICEF) between 2011 and 2015. Over the course of their first and second years at the institute, students are required to take Statistics I and Statistics II. During the second statistics course, students take three written exams—one in October, December and March. Each exam consists of two parts, each of which is 80 minutes long, with a small break in between. The maximum [score](#) is 100.

The students who participated in the study were assessed based on their grades in mathematics and statistics, their GPA (diligence and determination) during their first year, their grades on the exam taken before one of the three statistics exams, and their homework during their second year. On the day of the test, the researchers surveyed respondents during their breaks to see what scores they were expecting. By this point, they already knew what some of the questions were, but they had not seen the second part of the exam. The students whose predictions were fairly close to their actual scores received a bonus point at the end. This guaranteed that respondents would try to give as accurate a prediction as possible.

There are numerous works written on how accurately students are able to predict their results on exams. Many show that the research subjects often have inflated expectations. It is still disputed, however, how this affects academic success, and there are conflicting viewpoints. One says that overconfidence can discourage students from preparing for exams. Conversely, some studies suggest that high expectations cause students to study more.

This study showed that given similar academic results, students who expect higher scores actually attain them. In other words, the study refutes the idea that students who expect high scores are poorer students because they spend less time and effort studying. It is possible, the

authors say, that students with high expectations also have more ambition, a fighting spirit, determination, and as a result are certain in their success.

The authors of the study also analysed the gender specifics associated with academic performance expectations. There is no consensus on this, however. The results of the study showed that girls are more careful in their predictions than young men. Their expectations are more rational and are often more in line with reality, particularly on the third exam. In other words, girls are faster at learning to predict their performance results.

Overall, the research confirmed that, on average, all students—both boys and girls—are overwhelmingly inclined to overestimate their abilities. But with each passing exam, their predictions become more accurate.

According to one of the authors, Anatoly Peresetsky, this research can serve as a recommendation to lecturers to give tests at the beginning of a course so that students are able to adapt their expectations more quickly, as well as to distribute their efforts more rationally when it comes to the university's academic programme.

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**More information:** Jan R. Magnus et al, Grade Expectations: Rationality and Overconfidence, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02346](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02346)

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