

PSY401 – Expertise & Skill
Tuesday/Thursday, 12:40 - 2:00 PM
ONLINE (SYNCHRONOUS)

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Office Hours: Anytime before 9 PM

I. Overview

The question of what underlies exceptional performance in sports, arts, music, science, business, and other complex endeavors has been a topic of intense debate in psychology for well over a century. The purpose of this course is to review contemporary perspectives on the debate. We will read, discuss, and evaluate two bestselling books on this topic: Malcolm Gladwell's (2008) *Outliers: The story of success* and David Epstein's (2019) *Range: Why generalists triumph in a specialized world*. The books advance competing narratives about the origins of exceptional performance. Gladwell argues that success is as much—or more—a product of circumstance as it is of personal qualities, especially “talent.” He writes that ten thousand hours of training is the “magic number of true expertise.” Epstein counters that, while a copious amount of training is necessary for success, there is more to the story, beginning with innate talent. Who is right? The goal of this course is for you to decide for yourself, and to be able to back up your argument with evidence. We will critically evaluate each book, drawing on chapters in the Hambrick et al. (2018) *Science of Expertise* book, as well as scholarly articles from the psychological (and other) literatures.

Required Books

[Gladwell, M. \(2008\). *Outliers: The story of success*. Little, Brown and Company.](#)

[Epstein, D. \(2019\). *Range: Why generalists triumph in a specialized world*. Penguin Random House.](#)

[Hambrick, D. Z., Campitelli, G., & Macnamara, B. N. \(2018\). *The science of expertise: Behavioral, neural, and genetic approaches to complex skill*. Routledge.](#)

You can RENT the Hambrick et al. (2018) book until mid-December for around \$25.

II. Objectives

I have two expectations of you: Do all of the readings by the assigned date, and join class prepared for discussion. Through this course, I hope for you to improve your critical thinking, research, writing, and presenting skills.

III. Assignments and Evaluation

A. Quizzes: 20 points

There will be 2 in-class quizzes (**12:40 PM on Tuesday, 10/20 and Thursday, 11/19**). The quizzes will be short answer and will last 30 minutes each. The quizzes will assess your understanding of key issues discussed in class.

B. Paper: 40 points

You are assigned to write a paper on some major issue discussed in class. For approval, type out and e-mail a statement of your topic by **Tuesday, 10/20, 12:40 PM**. The minimum page length is 12 double-spaced (12-point font) pages of text (i.e., 12 pages, not including title page and reference page), and you should cite at least 10 scholarly sources, including at least 3 chapters from the Hambrick et al. (2018) *Science of Expertise* book, along with other sources (e.g., journal articles, chapters, books). **Please follow APA style**. I will not accept papers in some other style (e.g., MLA). For an excellent resource on APA style, visit:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

You must also include a data analysis in your paper, using a data set that you create specifically for this assignment. You must e-mail your data set to me (in an Excel spreadsheet) by **Thursday, 11/12, 12:40 PM**. Typically, students collect archival information from the internet (e.g., sports statistics). Results presented in a publication (article, chapter, etc.)

do **NOT** qualify as your data. For example, if you present a table or figure from a journal article, this does **NOT** count as your own data. You must gather **YOUR OWN** data and present **YOUR OWN** analysis. You will receive a zero for the assignment if you try to present someone else's results (e.g., a table or figure) as your data. Your paper is due on the day of exam, **Thursday, 12/17, 12:45 PM**.

C. Group Presentation: 40 points

With partners, you are assigned to give a 20-minute presentation (15-minute presentation, plus 5-minute Q & A session afterwards) on an exceptional performer. I will form the presentation teams. Your team should summarize the person's accomplishments, and then analyze their success in terms of theoretical concepts that we discuss in class. Your primary source for these theoretical concepts is the Hambrick et al. (2018) *Science of Expertise* book; you must cite at least 3 chapters in your presentation. You may also use biographies, autobiographies, documentaries, interviews, letters, etc., as sources for your presentation. You may even wish to contact your exceptional performer. The presentation must be in PowerPoint (.ppt or .pptx), and each team member should deliver some part of the presentation. Teams must send me their presentation by **Monday, 11/23, 11:59 PM**. **I will not accept late submissions.**

ATTENDANCE: Attendance will be taken in this course. You are allowed 3 unexcused absences during the semester; for each unexcused absence, I will take off 2 points from your course total. NO EXCEPTIONS, except death in the family, illness with doctor's note, or unavoidable academic/professional conflict (e.g., grad school interview, job interview). I will take attendance using the Chat feature in Zoom.

Grade Breakdown

Quizzes	20 points
Paper	40 points
Presentation	40 points

	100 points

IV. Workshops

I will hold two workshops outside of normal class hours (this will make up for the canceled class on Thursday, 10/25). The first workshop ("Preparing Your Data Set") will be on how to collect your data for the paper and how to prepare your data set. This will be on **Thursday, October 15, at 8 PM**. The second workshop ("Writing a Scientific Report") will be on **Monday, Thursday, November 19, at 8 PM**. Each workshop is scheduled for 2 hours (8-10 PM), but we will go longer if necessary. (I will send Zoom invites on the dates of the workshops.) Attendance will not be taken during the workshops, but I strongly encourage you to attend both. **Please note these dates in your schedule now so you can attend!**

V. Important Dates

10/15 Workshop I ("Preparing Your Data"), 8 PM
 10/20 Quiz 1, 12:40 PM
 10/20 Paper topic due (submit with quiz)
10/22 Class cancelled
 11/12 Excel spreadsheet with data set due, 12:40 PM
 11/19 Quiz 2, 12:40 PM; Workshop II ("Writing a Scientific Report"), 8 PM
 11/23 Group presentations due, 11:59 PM
 12/17 Papers due by exam period, 12:45 PM

Professor Hambrick reserves the right to correct any errors on this syllabus.