

PSY401 – Expertise & Skill (in person), Room 119, Psychology Building
Fall semester, 2023, Tuesday/Thursday, 3:00-4:20 PM
Zoom (for quizzes and exam): <https://msu.zoom.us/j/91839848709>
Professor: Zach Hambrick, Ph.D.
Office hours: Zoom, by appointment

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) classic pop psychology book *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. [[Purchase](#)]

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

Hambrick, D. Z., Campitelli, G., & Macnamara, B. N. (2018). *The science of expertise: Behavioral, neural, and genetic approaches to complex skill*. Routledge. [[See D2L for pdf of book](#)]

Objectives

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

Assignments and Evaluation

A. Quizzes/Exam: 30 points

There will be 2 quizzes (on **Thursday, 10/19** and **Thursday, 12/7**) and a final exam (**Wednesday, 12/13, 10 AM**); each quiz will count 5 points and the exam will count 20 points (for 30 points total). The quizzes will be short answer and will last 30 minutes each; the exam will be multiple-choice, short answer, and essay. The quizzes and exam will assess your understanding of key issues discussed in class.

B. Paper: 35 points

You are assigned to write a paper on some major issue discussed in class. For approval, type out and turn in a statement of your topic by **Thursday, 10/19** (to be submitted with Quiz 1; see “Important Dates” on next page). The minimum page length is 12 double-spaced (12-point font) pages of text (i.e., 12 pages, including title page, abstract, and reference page), and you should cite at least 6 scholarly sources, including at least 3 chapters from the Hambrick et al. (2018) 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).

You must also include a data analysis in your paper, using a data set that you create specifically for this assignment. You must submit (via e-mail) a data set to me (in an Excel spreadsheet) with your final paper. You will obtain your data from an archival internet source (e.g., sports statistics, biographical data). (You will be provided with more specific guidelines on the paper.)

IMPORTANT: 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 by midnight on **Thursday, 12/7**, the last class day.

Resources: A good resource for recent articles on expertise-related topics is the [Journal of Expertise](#). For an excellent resource on APA style, visit: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

C. Group Presentation: 35 points

With partners, you are assigned to give an in-person 20-minute presentation (15-minute in-person 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 his or her 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 email me their PowerPoint presentation on **Monday, 11/27 (by e-mail, 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 additional 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).

Grade Breakdown

Exam	20 points
Quizzes	10 points
Paper	35 points
Presentation	35 points

	100 points

Paper help session and workshop

A paper and presentation workshop will be held on Tuesday, 10/17 during class. I strongly encourage you to attend!

Important Dates

8/29	First class
10/17	Paper & presentation workshop
10/19	Paper topic due (with Quiz 1)
10/19	Quiz 1 (Zoom)
10/24	Fall break
11/23	Thanksgiving
11/27	Group presentations due (via e-mail by 11:59 PM)
11/28-12/5	Group presentations
12/7	Last class; Quiz 2 (Zoom); papers due with Excel data (via e-mail by 11:59 PM)
12/13	Exam, 10 AM

Reading Schedule

Week/Day

- 1 Tu 8/29 Overview of course, business
Th 8/31 Gladwell Introduction (“The Roseto Mystery”) / [NYT “Studying the Limits of Human Perfection”](#)
- 2 Tu 9/5 Gladwell Chapter 1 (“The Matthew Effect”) / [Barnsley et al. \(1988\)](#)
Th 9/7 [Wattie et al. \(2015\)](#)
- 3 Tu 9/12 Gladwell Chapter 2 (“The 10,000 Hour Rule”) / [Ericsson et al. \(2007\)](#)
Th 9/14 [Hambrick & Meinz \(2011\)](#), [Konnikova \(2016\)](#), [Hambrick et al. \(2020\)](#)
- 4 Tu 9/19 Gladwell Chapter 3 (“The Trouble with Geniuses Pt 1”) / [Lubinski & Benbow \(2021\)](#)
Th 9/21 [Simonton \(2006\)](#), Hambrick (2015)
- 5 Tu 9/26 Gladwell Chapter 4 (“The Trouble with Geniuses Pt 2”) / [Sternberg & Wagner \(1990\)](#)
Th 9/28 [Cianciolo et al. \(2006\)](#)
- 6 Tu 10/3 Gladwell Chapter 5 (“The Three Lessons of Joe Flom”)
Th 10/5 Gladwell critiques: Pinker (2009), [Chabris \(2013\)](#), [Gladwell \(2013\)](#)
- 7 Tu 10/10 Documentary I, “Man on Wire”, Calvin Tomkins, [“The Man Who Walks on Air”](#)
Th 10/12 Documentary I, discussion
- 8 Tu 10/17 Paper/presentation workshop
Th 10/19 Quiz 1 (via Zoom)
- 9 Tu 10/24 Fall break
Th 10/26 Epstein, Introduction (“Roger vs. Tiger”), Hambrick (2018), [Barth et al. \(2022\)](#)
- 10 Tu 10/31 [Turkheimer \(2000\)](#), [Mosing et al. \(2015\)](#) 🎃
Th 11/2 Epstein, Chapter 1 (“The Cult of Head Start”), [Howard \(2011\)](#)
- 11 Tu 11/7 Epstein, Chapter 2 (“How the Wicked World was Made”), [Hogarth et al. \(2015\)](#)
Th 11/9 Epstein, Chapter 3 (“When Less of the Same is More”), [Sloboda et al. \(1996\)](#)
- 12 Tu 11/14 Epstein, Chapter 4 (“Learning, Fast and Slow”), [Bjork & Bjork \(2011\)](#)
Th 11/16 Epstein, Chapter 6 (“The Trouble with Too Much Grit”), [Duckworth et al. \(2007\)](#); Documentary I
- 13 Tu 11/21 Documentary II, TBA, discussion
Th 11/23 Thanksgiving 🦃
- 14 Tu 11/28 Group presentations, Teams 1-3
Th 11/30 Group presentations, Teams 4-6
- 15 Tu 12/5 Group presentations, Teams 7-9
Th 12/7 Quiz 2 (via Zoom)
Paper and Excel datafile due by midnight
- 16 Wed 12/13 Exam (via Zoom)

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

[From the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#) (RCPD): Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Academic Honesty:

Article 2.III.B.2 of the [Academic Rights and Responsibilities](#) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the [insert name of unit offering course] adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in [General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades](#); the [all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations](#). See [Spartan Life Online](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu) (splife.studentlife.msu.edu) and/or the [MSU Web site](http://msu.edu) (msu.edu) for more.

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the [Academic Integrity webpage](#).)

Limits to Confidentiality:

Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

Disruptive Behavior:

Article 2.III.B.4 of [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.III.B.10 states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." [General Student Regulation 5.02](#) states: "No student shall . . . obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with the functions, services, or directives of the University, its offices, or its employees (e.g., classes, social, cultural, and athletic events, computing services, registration, housing and food services, governance meetings, and hearings)." Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judicial Affairs office.

Policy on Use of Generative AI

The use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) **IS PERMITTED** in this course for:

- Brainstorming and refining ideas
- Fine-tuning paper topic
- Finding information about your topic
- Checking grammar and style

Note: If you chose to use a generative AI tool, you are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited to stay within university policies on academic integrity and the Spartan Code of Honor Academic Pledge. Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways will result in a 0 (zero) for the assignment. When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

The use of generative AI tools **IS NOT PERMITTED** in the completion of **any** class assignment in this course for:

- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs, or larger units of text.
- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs, or larger units of text with non-substantive changes.

Either of these activities is considered plagiarism.