

Motivation by Anticipation: Expecting Rapid Feedback Enhances Performance

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There are a number of factors that influence how well we do in school, including the amount of time we study and our interest in a subject. Now, according to new findings in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, how quickly we expect to receive our grades may also influence how we perform.

Psychological scientists Keri L. Kettle and Gerald Häubl of the University of Alberta in Canada wanted to investigate how the timing of expected feedback impacts individuals' performance. For this experiment, they recruited students enrolled in a class that required each student to give a 4-minute oral presentation. The presentations were rated by classmates on a scale from 0 (*poor*) to 10 (*excellent*) and the average of these ratings formed the presenter's grade for that part of the course. Students received an email 1 day, 8 days, or 15 days before their presentation and were invited to participate in this research study. Students agreeing to volunteer in the study were informed when they would receive feedback on their presentation and were asked to predict their grades. Participating students were randomly assigned to a specific amount of anticipated feedback delay, which ranged from 0 (same day) to 17 days.

The results reveal a very interesting relationship between how soon the students expected to receive their grades and their performance: Students who were told they would receive feedback quickly on their performance earned higher grades than students who expected feedback at a later time. Furthermore, when students expected to receive their grades quickly, they predicted that their performance would be worse than students who were to receive feedback later. This pattern suggests that anticipating rapid feedback may improve performance because the threat of disappointment is more prominent. As the authors note, "People do best precisely when their predictions about their own performance are least optimistic."

Although this experiment took place in a classroom, the authors conclude that these findings "have important practical implications for all individuals who are responsible for mentoring and for evaluating the performance of others."