



Motivation & Your Beliefs

Much of what we choose to do is determined by our underlying beliefs. You might be a math major because you believe you're good at math; you might be a journalism major because you believe you're good at writing. Even if the belief has a basis in fact (maybe you really are good at math!), it's likely that your belief about that was influenced along the way.

Beliefs directly influence the goals we set and our motivation for achieving them. Analyzing your beliefs about academics and school can be useful in generating the motivation you need to be a successful student.

There are three categories of beliefs:

Self-efficacy beliefs

This is our perception about how good we are at a specific task. It is not the same as self-esteem, which is a more global concept. In general, it's easier to maintain motivation for something we think we're good at than for something we think we're not good at.

Enabling vs. self-sabotaging beliefs

Enabling beliefs motivate us, while self-sabotaging beliefs do not. Students who practice enabling beliefs believe that their actions influence outcomes; students with self-sabotaging beliefs may feel their efforts will be fruitless. When coupled with self-efficacy beliefs, however, this becomes complicated (see diagram on reverse).

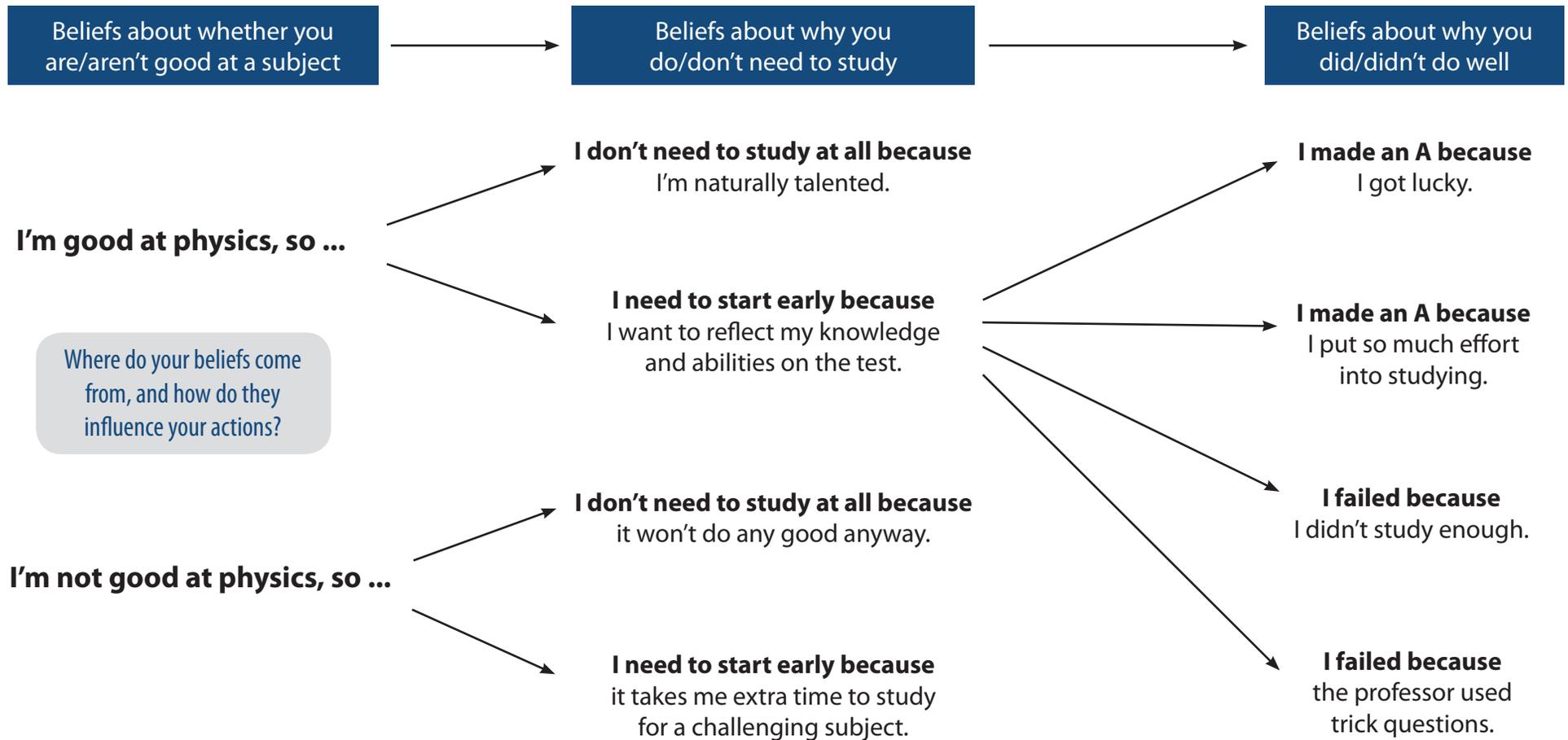
Attributional beliefs

Who – or what – do you attribute your successes and failures to?

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| • Yourself | "I made a good grade because I studied hard." |
| • The professor | "I didn't do well because the professor doesn't like me." |
| • Other circumstances | "I only did well because I got lucky." |

It's important to accurately analyze the reasons for your successes and failures, and to take ownership of those reasons.

Beliefs come from a number of places—our own experiences with task outcomes, teachers/professors, family, and friends. The diagram below shows how beliefs about academic performance can relate to each another. A few examples are shown, but many more are possible.



Consider something you think you're "just not good" at.

What is it?

Why do you think you feel this way? Did somebody tell you you're not good at the task? Did you make a bad grade? Anything else?

How will these beliefs influence you the next time you have to do a related task? Do you think you'll try harder to be successful, or do you think you'll not try as hard?

Are your beliefs enabling or self-sabotaging? If so, how can you make them enabling? What beliefs have to change to make this happen?