Research Guide
College and Career Competency:
Perseverance/Grit

Definition:

Perseverance may be defined as the commitment and resilience necessary to achieve a desired result in the face of challenges or setbacks. Peterson and Seligman (2004) define perseverance as "finishing what one has started, keeping on despite obstacles, taking care of business, achieving closure, staying on task, getting it off one's desk and out the door" (p. 202). Perseverance is associated closely with grit, which is "the perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007). Perseverant individuals typically feel capable of achievement and responsible for the outcomes of their efforts over time.

Essential Components for Students:

1. Sustain goal-directed action through commitment.
2. Continue despite experiencing setbacks.

Research:

- Perseverance is a core virtue and a critical quality for personal development and fulfillment. As King (2014) writes, "Perseverance is necessary for the possession and exercise of several other intellectual virtues, including courage" (p. 3503).
- The National Research Council considers perseverance an indicator of work ethic and has identified it as an important 21st-century intrapersonal skill (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012).
- Teachers who promote perseverance among their students can foster engagement and produce excellent results in the classroom. Farrington et al. (2012) assert, "If classrooms can support positive academic mindsets and help students build effective learning strategies, then classrooms could contribute significantly to increasing students' perseverance in completing school assignments and hence to improving their academic performance" (p. 25).
- Students who demonstrate perseverance in their schoolwork show a greater mastery of content and receive better grades than students who do not persevere (Farrington et al., 2012; Morton, 2014).
- Across their studies involving Army special forces personnel, sales representatives, and high school students, Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) concluded that perseverant or gritty individuals are "less likely to drop out of their respective life commitments" than those who lack perseverance or grit (p. 10).
- Having a sense of community or comradery can bolster students' desire to persevere. Supportive friendships have been proven to equip students with persevering mindsets and behaviors (Alexakos et al., 2011).
- A correlation exists between a positive mindset and perseverance. Individuals with high self-esteem and optimism persevere longer than those with low self-esteem and little optimism (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013). Optimistic students tend to

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persevere and consequently excel in **problem-solving** scenarios. Williams (2014) found that students in mathematics classes who exhibit high levels of perseverance discover "ways to proceed toward successes when situations are unfamiliar and a clear pathway is not apparent" (p. 420).

- In the work world, research indicates that perseverance in the face of adversity is essential to successful innovation and entrepreneurship (van Gelderen, 2012). A study by Markman et al. (2005) shows that highly perseverant inventors enjoy higher earnings and, by proxy, may be considered more accomplished than inventors who are less perseverant.

Assessments:
- Perseverance can be measured using the Grit Scale. The Grit Scale is a 12-item, self-reported instrument using a 5-point rating scale that ranges from *very much like me* to *not like me at all*. For more details, see Duckworth et al. (2007).
- The 91-item Human Behavior Rating Scale (HBRS) measures persistence, **curiosity**, externalizing affect, internalizing affect, and cognition. See Eaves (2002) and Woods-Groves (2015) for more information.
- Several instruments that measure grit, persistence, and perseverance can be found in a compendium of social and emotional measures provided by the StriveTogether Task Force (2013). See pages 110–116.

Instructional Practices:
- Students can be taught to persevere. According to Farrington et al. (2012), the primary means for teachers to instill perseverance in their students is to help them develop and practice effective learning strategies. These learning strategies support students' success at tasks and help make those tasks easier, thus making it more likely that students will persevere. Also, the learning strategies become part of the student's larger toolkit that allows more academic engagement. Farrington et al. (2012) add that teachers can either "'teach' perseverance directly (changing the student) or…influence perseverance indirectly through other mechanisms (changing the context)" (p. 25).
- Blackwell et al. (2007) maintain that it is important for teachers to teach students that their ability and competence grow with effort. Envisioning the future aids in perseverance. Known as mental contrasting and implementation intentions, teachers can ask students to write down two positive outcomes for completing a task, two obstacles they anticipate encountering along the way, and a plan for overcoming those obstacles. Such an activity has been shown to cultivate perseverance among students (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010).
- **Goal setting** can play an important role in initiating perseverance among students. Students with mastery goals (i.e., goals that are focused on personal growth versus goals that are focused on doing better than others) in particular are inclined to persevere when faced with obstacles (Ames, 1992). Students are also likely to persevere when they develop strategies and markers of progress for completing long-term assignments. Breaking assignments into manageable steps helps students see the individual parts of a greater whole and work through whatever difficulties they encounter with a clear end in mind (Boller, 2008).
- Teachers have found the Student Success Skills program and Thinkertools to be excellent ways of addressing students' individual goals and progress in the classroom (note that these resources are available for a fee). The Student Success Skills program assists students in grades

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5–10 with goal setting, monitoring, building a supportive community, cognitive and memory skills, building optimism, and dealing with pressure and anxiety. Thinkertools helps students in grades 7–9 learn to monitor and reflect on progress during inquiry science projects.

- Meaningfulness matters when it comes to task perseverance. Research by the National Research Council Institute for Medicine (2004) demonstrates that authentic learning motivates students and encourages grit. Teachers who can connect lessons and assignments to relevant real-world issues or applications can trigger perseverance in students. An effective way to connect learning and make it meaningful to students is to use exit tickets that ask the student to reflect and comment on what they just learned (see these examples).
- Students' emotional well-being plays a significant part in developing and maintaining a perseverant mindset. Caring and involved teachers can inspire **motivation** among their students. Indeed, students are inclined to persevere in assignment completion when they feel their teachers care about them and treat them fairly (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2004). Additional research shows that teachers can promote perseverance among their students by offering them positive and immediate feedback on their performances (Goodwin & Miller, 2012; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Praising students' efforts—not intelligence—is an especially useful way to inspire perseverance in the classroom (Dweck et al., 2011). An example of how a teacher has applied this approach can be seen in the video "My Favorite No."
- Students benefit from ongoing reflection and revision of their work. Such practices demonstrate the role of perseverance in the attainment of better outcomes (National Research Council and Institute for Medicine, 2004).

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