

# Conscientious people are more likely to have higher GPAs

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Conscientious people are more likely to have higher grade point averages, according to new research from psychologists at Rice University.

The paper examines previous studies that research the link between the "Big Five" personality traits – [agreeableness](#), conscientiousness, extraversion, [neuroticism](#) and openness to experience – and college [grade point](#) average. It finds that across studies, higher levels of conscientiousness lead to higher college grade point averages. It also shows that five common personality tests are consistent in their evaluation of the "Big Five" personality traits; all five measures found a positive correlation between conscientiousness and grade point average and virtually no correlation between the other four personality traits and grade point average.

According to Sam McAbee, a psychology graduate student at Rice and the study's lead author, the study has important implications for college admission offices and employers, who use personality tests to measure an individual's capacity for success.

"Research on these personality tests helps us gain a better understanding of how various personality traits may affect [academic outcomes](#) and other important life outcomes," McAbee said. "And although some researchers have questioned whether these personality measures might vary in their validity or effectiveness for predicting these outcomes, our analysis shows that all five measures produce similar results in the

academic domain."

"Of course, institutions like Rice provide intellectual environments for any student to flourish," said Fred Oswald, professor of psychology and the study's co-author. "But because [college admissions](#) generally does not select directly or heavily on personality traits, admitted students who score higher on measures of conscientiousness will tend to excel in academic pursuits above and beyond what their high-school [grade point averages](#) or achievement test scores would suggest by themselves."

The paper reviewed 51 previous studies (more than 26,000 total participants) published between 1992 and 2012 that investigated relationships between the "Big Five" personality traits and college grade point average. It included 26 studies using U.S. samples, 19 using European samples and six using samples from other areas of the world. More than 95 percent of the studies used volunteers in their research, and the remaining studies used surveys of incoming classes.

All 51 studies used one of the five most common tests of personality – the NEO Personality Inventory, the NEO Five-Factor Inventory, the Big Five Inventory, Goldberg's Unipolar Big Five Factor Markers or the Big Five International Personality Item Pool – to measure the link between these personality traits and grade point average. These [personality tests](#) ask people to rate how much they agree or disagree with various statements or descriptions about themselves, such as "I am always prepared" and "I am exacting in my work." All of the tests examined in the current study included eight to 12 such items for each personality trait.

Both McAbee and Oswald hope the study will encourage further research of how personality impacts student success.

"Grade point average is just one of many factors that can predict student

performance and long-term success," McAbee said. "We hope our findings will encourage research that investigates how different [personality traits](#) impact important outcomes."

**More information:** The study, "The Criterion-Related Validity of Personality Measures for Predicting GPA: A Meta-Analytic Validity Competition," appears in the online edition of *Psychological Assessment* and is available online at [psycnet.apa.org/psycarticles/2013-04446-001.pdf](https://psycnet.apa.org/psycarticles/2013-04446-001.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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