

# What is grit?

One way to think about grit is to consider what grit isn't. Grit isn't talent. Grit isn't luck. Grit isn't how intensely, for the moment, you want something.

Instead, grit is about having a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do. And grit is holding steadfast to that goal over time-- even when you fall down. even when you mess up and even when progress toward that goal is halting or slow.

Talent and luck matter to success. But talent and luck are no guarantee of grit. And in the very long run, grit may matter as least as much, if not more, to what you achieve.

## What does grit look like?

Students with grit might

- develop and deepen their interests
- stick with commitments, even when it's difficult
- not quit a sport in the middle of the season
- revise an essay repeatedly
- ask other people for feedback about how they can improve

## If I'm gritty about one thing, will I be gritty about other things?

Not necessarily. To be gritty, in my view, is to have passion and perseverance about something in your life. This doesn't mean that you necessarily engage in all possible pursuits with equivalent passion and perseverance. And indeed, the limits of time and energy suggest that focusing on one thing means focusing less on others. You can't pursue becoming a great pianist and at the same time a great mathematician, and a great sprinter and chef and philosopher...But it's also true, I think, that to be gritty means to pursue *something* with consistency of interest and effort. Some people choose not to pursue anything in a committed way, and that, to me, is lack of grit.

## When does grit matter most?

I study grit because it predicts achieving goals, but I want to point out that grit is more relevant to some goals than others. In particular, grit predicts achievement in really challenging and personally meaningful contexts. Graduating from high school or college rather than dropping out is one example. Returning to the National Spelling Bee with hopes of doing better than you did last year is another. But there are other goals for which enduring passion and perseverance are less relevant. Getting started on your taxes before April 15 takes self-control more than grit, for instance. Ditto for studying for a history test on Friday when you'd rather be on Instagram. For the record, I believe grit will for many adolescents be more evident in activities pursued *outside* of the classroom—in the school play, on the football field, in the school orchestra, in community service, and so on. This is what educational psychologist Warren Willingham found in [1985](#), and it is also what I find in my more recent [research](#).

# Where do I need to be grittier?

Most of us aren't gritty in every situation; our grit level depends on the activity or circumstance.

Here is more information about the five grit domains:

1. Academic Grit – having academic grit allows you to persevere in tasks like papers, tests, and homework and helps you fulfill your academic responsibilities over the long haul.
2. Social/Relationship Grit – social/relationship grit helps you put yourself in social situations that you want to take on even when you feel uncomfortable. It's not about turning an introvert into an extrovert, but rather accomplishing social/relationship goals that are important to each person.
3. Wellness/Health Grit – having wellness/health grit helps you stick to an exercise routine, sleep schedule, or maintain healthy eating habits. When you hit a challenge in this area, you are able to get on back on track.
4. Extracurricular Grit – with extracurricular grit you are able to practice, persist, and rebound when faced with obstacles or setbacks in extracurricular activities like sports, the arts, clubs, or volunteering.
5. Emotional Grit – emotional grit helps you manage your emotions, face your fears, cope with anger, and recover from emotional challenges. With emotional grit, you are able to control your emotions instead of letting them control you.