

The Impact of Course Deadline Flexibility on Student Performance



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Introduction

- The impact of course deadline flexibility has been a long-standing debate in college courses.
- Some advocate increased flexibility and others support deadlines as a means of providing structure for students (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Bryant, Campbell, & Kerr, 2003).
- This debate was highlighted during the recent pandemic.
- This Introductory Psychology course utilizes chapter quizzes as lower stakes, formative assessments to help students practice for later exams (Stavredes, 2011).

Method

- A total of 37 students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology were included for analysis.
- Data was collected across two sections taught by the same instructor.
- In one section the online chapter quizzes were due on specific dates on the syllabus (usually the class following the completion of a chapter).
- In the second section the quizzes could be completed any time up until the day of the exams
- All other aspects of the course were the same including the textbook, slides, lecture materials, assignments, activities, and assessments.
- The student performance on three in-class, closed book tests and overall final grades (comprising tests and other assignments) were compared.
- The students were all 11th graders enrolled in the Early College Academy at a small private university in the Mid Atlantic. Specific demographics were not collected but the students are 78% female and predominantly Black and Hispanic.

	Flexible	Non-flexible
Liked Quizzes due after class discussion	n/a	100%
Liked Quizzes due before exam	75%	n/a
Would have preferred quizzes due after discussion	12.5%	n/a
Didn't find quizzes useful	12.5%	0

	Flexible (n=18)	Non-Flexible (n=19)
Exam 1	54.5	66.18
Exam 2	60.78	67.24
Exam 3	68.44	74.24
Quizzes	71.11 (1.6 quizzes missed)	82.26 (.84 quizzes missed)
Final Course Grade	78.44	86.31

Results

- All the in-class tests showed slightly higher scores in the non-flexible class section.
- The flexible section missed more quizzes and scored lower overall on the total quiz section than the non-flexible section.
- Overall class grades encompass these test scores as well other assignments. The flexible section scored lower than the non-flexible section.
- *None of the differences observed were statistically significant.*

Discussion

- This data suggests that flexibility did not increase student performance and may in fact, have the opposite effect.
- Though the recorded differences were not statistically significant they do represent real world significance for students. The average recorded final grade in the flexible section was a C+ compared to a B average in the non-flexible section.
- Further research is needed to examine if there were other factors present that may have contributed to the observed difference.
- Also, it is important to note that these were dually enrolled high school students. Further research should explore whether similar results are seen in classes with traditionally college-aged students.

References

- Ariely, D. & Wertenbroch, K. (2002). Procrastination, Deadlines, And Performance: Self-Control by Precommitment. *Psychological Science*, 13 (3), 219-224.
- Bryant, K., Campbell, J. & Kerr, D. (2003). Impact of Web Based Flexible Learning on Academic Performance in Information Systems. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 14 (1), 41-50.
- Stavredes, T. (2011). *Effective Online Teaching: Foundations and Strategies for Student Success*. John Wiley and Sons.