

# The Role of Anxiety in Perceiving Instructor Behaviors

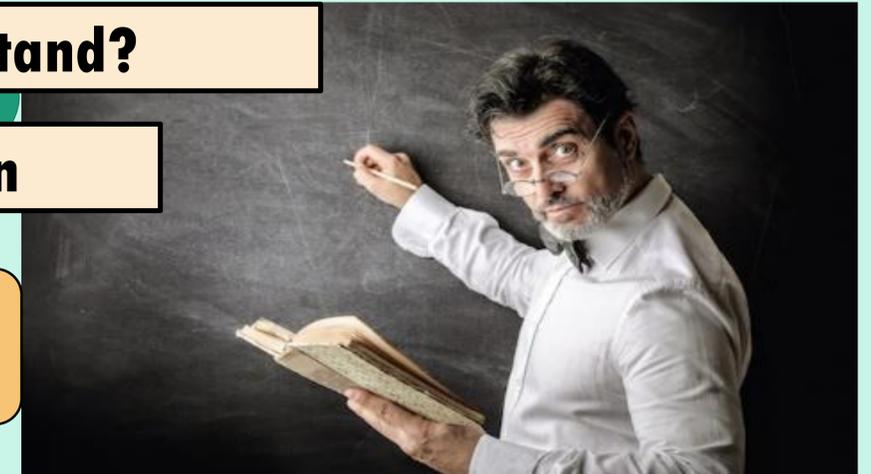
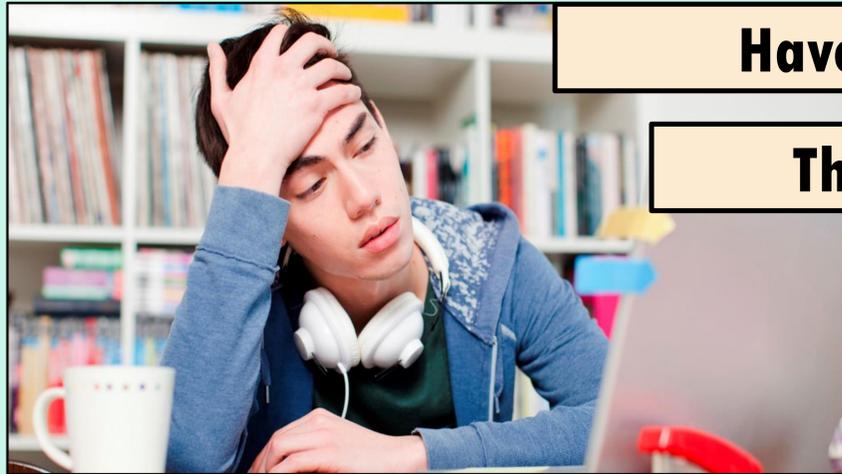


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## Have you ever had a professor you can't stand?

### The link between anxiety and perception



**Research Question:** What are student motives for perceiving instructor behaviors positively?

#### Introduction

College instructors are tasked with working with students in the education process. The task is complicated by the communication between the instructor and the student. The behaviors of the professor can have far reaching effects in this setting. A student's perception of these behaviors is valuable information to help improve the process. When asking for this information, are we asking the right questions?

#### Student Perception and Motivation

Students have perceptions regarding the behaviors of others. When in a class, and students are interacting with instructors, how are the student's perceiving the instructor's behaviors? This perception, and the reaction to it, is an important component of the classroom environment, (Galanes, & Carmack, 2013). The reasoning or motivation behind student perception is a key element to a student's experience in the classroom. There are two overarching theories involved in this process. The first is Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), established by Berger & Calabrese, (1975). It is used to explain motivations in one-to-one scenarios. It is useful when predicting the behaviors of others and understanding why others behave how they do. The second is Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory established by William Gudykunst, (1988). It is useful in explaining intercultural and intergroup motivation. Uncertainty about how others will act and anxiety about behaviors in a cultural context are studied through this theory.

#### Student Anxiety

Many aspects of college life have anxiety associated with them. Some of the anxiety has an attachment to classroom instruction and content. Anxiety can also be associated with many other student behaviors.

##### Student anxiety triggers

- Public speaking
- Group projects
- Costs associated with tuition and books
- Assignments and due dates
- Exams
- Answering questions in class
- Social aspects of student-to-student interactions

#### Instructor Behaviors

Instructors make decisions in class that students will perceive in positive or negative ways.

- Assignments and Exams
- Required Course Materials
- Student Participation
- Moving Deadlines

#### Research Design and Methods

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted on a one-on-one basis. Audio of the interviews will be recorded. The interviews will be analyzed to determine if there are common motives among students for identifying instructor behaviors positively. Specific questions will be asked to identify instructor behaviors. The students will be asked to decide what behaviors are positive. Follow-up questions may also be asked to help identify motives for these student perceptions. Anxiety questions will be asked after the student is allowed to describe the motivation in their own words.

#### Preliminary Suppositions

If the results of the interviews show a strong correlation between how students perceive instructor behaviors and the level of the student's personal anxiety then strategies to mitigate anxiety in the classroom should be of great importance to instructors. Reduced levels of anxiety for students have the potential to lead to higher performance for students and instructors

##### References

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- Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). *Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication*. *Human Communication Research*, 1, 99 - 112.
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**Hypothesis:** Students will be motivated to perceive instructor behaviors as positive when the behaviors reduce the student's level of personal anxiety.

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