

Correlations between Student Evaluations and Grades

Review of the extensive body of research literature on student ratings indicates that there is widespread agreement that students' grades are positively correlated with student evaluations. What is not agreed upon is the meaning or the strength of the correlation. The most commonly cited correlation is 0.2–0.3, but researchers working in both field (real classroom ratings) and laboratory settings report correlation coefficients that vary from 0.1–0.5. Many of the studies use the variable “Expected Grade” as a reasonable proxy for actual grades because most student ratings forms are completed by students before they receive their final grades. The degree and direction of the correlation for any one course, instructor, or student will vary depending on the instructional context.

Many of the researchers cited below urge extreme caution when interpreting the meaning of the correlation. Higher grades might represent, student learning, grading leniency, or students' characteristics unrelated to instruction. Most researchers, even those investigating grading leniency, agree that *when students perceive that they are learning they usually evaluate instructors more highly* (and reasonably so). Note that none of the works that claim grading practices artificially inflate student ratings is widely accepted by the student ratings research community. In fact, some of the research indicates poor teachers who try to increase their scores by boosting students' grades may result in lower ratings (i.e. poor teachers may not be able to fool students by 'giving away' high grades).

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