



SYLLABUS

LIFE LESSONS FROM PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY

Instructor: Nick Stow

Contact hours: 40

Class times: Tuesday 2.00pm-5.00pm

LONDON, UK

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Drawing on research and applied practice in Performance psychology alongside related disciplines such as Sport, Educational and Organisational psychology, the course helps students investigate how high performers prepare, adapt, and grow through adversity and how these lessons can be applied to everyday contexts such as study, relationships, leadership and major life transitions. Students will engage in self-reflection, case study analysis, and practical workshops to build skills in self-awareness, decision-making, and resilience.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This interdisciplinary course explores what elite performers — from sport, the arts, business, and the military — can teach us about thriving under pressure and building meaningful lives. Framed through a BioPsychoSocial lens, students will examine how psychological, physiological, and social factors interact to shape human performance and well-being.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Apply key concepts from performance psychology to personal, academic, and professional contexts
- Critically examine personal beliefs, behaviors, and responses in high-pressure situations
- Design and practice strategies to enhance resilience, well-being, motivation, leadership, and teamwork
- Communicate psychological insights effectively through reflective, analytical, and creative output

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

The sessions combine introductory lectures, discussions and group work. Students will be expected to actively prepare for all classes. The classes are highly participative with an emphasis on personal reflection and real-world application. Classes will generally involve seminar-style presentations followed by discussion and student-led research, resulting in student/group presentations to the class.

COURSE READINGS

Readings will be provided and podcasts used to supplement readings where appropriate.

Cotterill, S. (2018). The Psychology of Performance. Routledge.

Humphrey, J & Hughes, D. (2021). High Performance: Lessons from the Best on Becoming Your Best. Penguin Books.

Students will be expected to access **The Journal of Performance Psychology**, which is an online peer-reviewed journal committed to the dissemination of relevant and timely research in the field of performance psychology.

METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)

1. Class Participation (25%): Assessed through consistent, intentional presence in class, including evidence of preparatory work; contributions to discussions, group work, mini-presentations and applied exercises.

Purpose: Reinforce active learning, teamwork and communication.

Criteria: Quality and relevance of contributions, collaboration, respect and initiative.

2. Reflection Journal (25%): Weekly entries (250-500 words) tied to themes discussed in class with a focus on self-awareness, application of research/theories to real-world context.

Purpose: Develops ongoing self-awareness and integration of performance psychology into personal experience.

Criteria: Depth of reflection, integration of theory, evidence of engagement, and clarity.

3. Mid-Course Presentation (25%): 10 min presentation exploring one chosen theme and application to both self (reflection) and external context, e.g. sport, arts, business, education.

Purpose: Encouraging early synthesis of theory and application – acts as a stepping stone to the final project.

Criteria: Clarity of communication, integration of theory, engagement with evidence, and ability to apply insights meaningfully.

4. Final Integrative Project (25%): Students can choose between an applied essay, a creative project + 1000-word commentary, or a practical workshop. 20 min.

Purpose: Synthesises multiple course themes and demonstrates applied, creative understanding.

Criteria: Integration of course concepts, critical thinking, originality, practical relevance and communication.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to Performance Psychology

This session introduces the Course structure and the concept of performance, its different meanings across cultures and disciplines, and invites students to reflect on their own relationship with performance. We will distinguish between *performance* and *outcome*, setting the stage for the course's Biopsychosocial framework. We will also examine the concept of Procrastination (providing we feel like it!)

“Man is not worried by real problems so much as by his imagined anxieties about real problems.” – Epictetus (Greece, Stoicism)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to explain different definitions of performance and reflect on their personal experiences and expectations.

Readings: Young, B. W., Eccles, D. W., Williams, A. M., & Baker, J. (2021). K. Anders Ericsson, deliberate practice, and sport: Contributions, collaborations, and controversies. *Journal of Expertise*, 4(2), 169–189.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #1.

Week 2: Self-Awareness and Identity Under Pressure & Guest Speaker (TBC)

Guest speaker(s) from sport, business, or the arts will share experiences of high-pressure performance. This session examines the role of self-awareness in performance, including identifying strengths, values, and growth areas. Students will explore how self-concept influences motivation, coping under pressure.

“Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.” – Lao Tzu (China, Taoism)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to assess their own performance values and analyse how identity shapes behavior in high-pressure contexts.

Readings: Roberts, B. W., & Wood, D. (2006). Personality development in the context of the neo-socioanalytic model of personality. *Handbook of Personality Development*.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #2. Select 3 potential Presentation topics.

Week 3: Wellbeing, Balance, and Recovery

We consider wellbeing not as an endpoint but as a dynamic process of balance and adaptation. Students explore strategies for maintaining resilience, including recovery routines, mindfulness, and lifestyle factors that influence sustainable performance. We discuss Hedonic vs Eudaimonic approaches to wellbeing and how to find balance short and long terms fulfilment.

“Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.” – Dalai Lama (Tibet, Buddhism)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to critically evaluate wellbeing strategies and design personal approaches for recovery and balance.

Readings: Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 141–166.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #3 and mini-Presentation (plan for main Presentation).

Week 4: Motivation and Discipline

This week explores the psychology of motivation, discipline, and self-regulation. intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, goal setting, and habit formation, using examples from elite performers and everyday life. We will also review Mid-Course Presentation Plans via 2 min overview of plan for main Presentation.

“It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.” – Confucius (China)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to apply motivational frameworks to personal and academic contexts and evaluate strategies for building discipline.

Readings: Research specific to Presentation content.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #4 and Prepare for Presentation.

Week 5 Mid-Course Presentations

Students present their mid-course projects, linking a course theme to both personal reflection and external context.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” – attributed to Confucius (popularly quoted via Benjamin Franklin)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to integrate theory with applied practice and communicate insights clearly.

Readings: Research specific to Presentation content.

Assignments: Mid-Course Presentation (graded). Reflection Journal #5.

Week 6: Communication and Teamwork & Guest Speaker (TBC)

This session examines the role of focus, active listening, and constructive communication in group settings. Case studies from sport, business, and the arts will illustrate how effective teamwork enhances collective performance.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” – African (possibly Burkina Faso) Proverb

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to demonstrate collaborative communication strategies and reflect on the dynamics of teamwork.

Readings: Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #6. Select 3 potential topics for Final project.

Week 7: Leadership and Ethical Responsibility

We explore leadership styles and frameworks, with emphasis on values-driven and ethical approaches. Students will critically examine how different leadership styles manifest in team, educational, and organisational contexts.

“He who wishes to be obeyed must know how to command.” – Niccolò Machiavelli (Italy)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to evaluate different leadership approaches and apply them to their own contexts.

Readings: Michel, A. J. (2024). Comparative analysis of leadership theories: Transformational, servant, situational, and skills approach in organizational contexts. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 29(12, Series 6), 10–16.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #7 and present plan for Final project.

Week 8: Stress and Resilience & Guest Speaker (TBC)

This session investigates how stress impacts performance and how resilience can be developed through exposure, reflection, reframing and most importantly building and contributing to support networks. Students will practice resilience-building strategies drawn from psychology and elite performance contexts.

“The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists.” – Japanese Proverb

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to distinguish stress management from resilience and implement strategies for both.

Readings: Focus on Research for final Project.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #8. Continue preparation for Final project.

Week 9: Decision-Making Under Pressure

We examine how individuals and groups make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, risk, and time pressure. Students will engage in applied decision-making exercises and reflect on personal tendencies.

“In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.” – Sun Tzu (China, *The Art of War*)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to analyse decision-making models and apply them to high-pressure contexts.

Kahneman, D., & Klein, G. (2009). Conditions for intuitive expertise: A failure to disagree. *American Psychologist*, 64(6), 515–526.

Assignments: Reflection Journal #9. Preparations for Final Project.

Week 10: Integration and Final Project Presentations

In the final week, students synthesise insights from across the course in their chosen final project format (applied essay, creative project + commentary, or workshop). Emphasis will be placed on integration and applied understanding.

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” – Mary Oliver (USA, poet)

Learning objectives: By the end of this session, students should be able to demonstrate

holistic understanding of performance psychology and communicate it effectively.

Readings: Focus on Research for final Project.

Assignments: Final Integrative Project (graded).

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at <https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>.

GEN-AI POLICY

Students can use GenAI tools in this class to help with certain aspects of course work and assignments. This includes brainstorming ideas, creating a paper outline, or summarizing research findings of articles. However, you cannot use content such as text or graphics created by GenAI tools in your work; rather, you must be the author/creator of your work submissions. For example, you can use a GenAI tool to suggest a paper outline based on a draft you provide it, but you cannot submit a paper with text generated by GenAI as if the text is your own writing. Be advised, in accordance with UO policy, if I believe you've handed in work created whole or in part by GenAI tools, I may submit a report of suspected academic misconduct to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for that office to make a determination of responsibility and, if warranted, assess a grade penalty. So, if you are in doubt or have questions about a particular GenAI tool and if its use is okay, check in with me and let's discuss!

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory, whether in class or on visits. See attendance policy.