

Achievement Workshop  
(*Student Success Series*)

# Power of Expectations in Academics

*Learn to Recognize  
What is Driving You*



[Achievement Workshop Series](#)  
[Academic Support and Achievement Center](#)  
[Mt. San Antonio College](#)

6-101

<https://www.mtsac.edu/asac/achievement-workshops/>

## Overview:

Expectations are a powerful thing. They can be internal or external, realistic or unrealistic, positive or negative, appropriate or inappropriate, and concrete or abstract. Expectations can provide motivation to succeed in your goals or interfere with your success. Spend time exploring how expectations affect your academic success and discover resources that can help you manage both positive and negative expectations to help you succeed in your classes, school, and life.

## Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Define what is an expectation
- Recognize different types of expectations
- Identify at least one positive expectation in their life
- Identify at least one negative expectation in their life
- Receive resources to improve their expectations

## Introduction:

What are “expectations” and why are they so powerful? They are powerful because they can affect all areas of your life, including success in your classes. Expectations are so powerful because they affect your emotions and behavior; which in turn affects your actions and their results. Yet at the same time, it is very common that many people are not aware of the fact that they are being driven by an expectation of some unrealized outcome. Adding to the challenges that expectations present, are when two or more people have differing or conflicting expectations.

## Definition:

Dictionary.com defines “expectation” as “the act or state of looking forward or anticipating.” This definition should, but does not, include that an expectation is anticipating a particular outcome, result, or reward.

## Types of Expectations:

There are several different types of expectations.

- **Internal:** Internal expectations are ones that you personally have. They can be what you want, or how you think things “should be.” They can come from a variety of sources, such as your personality, needs, emotions, values, interests, priorities, age/life stage development, life experience, and/or your environment (see “External” below). Your internal expectations can be those you personally hold for yourself, for others, or anything else in the universe.
- **External:** External expectations are those that others or the world have of you. Those external forces can include, family, friends, generation, religion, community, culture, politics, society, school, work (i.e., company, supervisor, co-workers, customers, etc.), institutions, such as government, businesses, media, etc.
- **Positive:** Positive expectations are those that anticipate a favorable outcome. Examples include: I can change my circumstances if I don’t like them. I will lose 20 pounds this year. I will pass my math class. I will graduate from college. I will succeed at achieving my career

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goals.

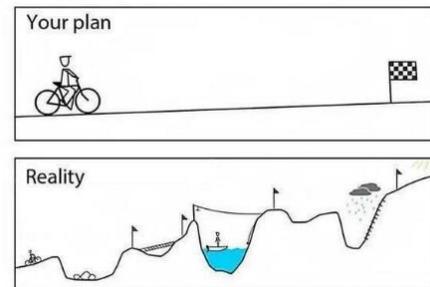
- **Negative:** A negative expectation is anticipating a negative outcome. For example, assuming that you are dumb so you won’t pass your class. Or I’m just not “college material,” so I can’t succeed in college.’ Sometimes people have negative expectations of other people, such as ‘he’s a loser, therefore he won’t accomplish anything’ or ‘she’s going to fail at life because.... (fill in the blank)’

Sometimes the thing that is holding you back...



...is all in your head.

- **Realistic:** A realistic expectation is one that is likely to happen under normal circumstances and if the necessary pre-requisite actions occur. Examples include understanding and accepting the fact that you live in a flawed and imperfect world; thus, problems are a fact of life. However, you can learn to manage problems, rather than try to avoid them altogether. Realistic academic expectations include expecting that you can pass your class if you have met the pre-requisites, do your homework, seek tutoring, and ask for help when you need it.



- **Unrealistic:** An unrealistic expectation is one that is not likely to occur because it does not match reality or current circumstances. For example, expecting to live a fairy-tail, problem-free life that will always be perfect. An unrealistic education expectation is thinking you can work full time, carry 20-unit load and still maintain a 4.0 GPA. An unrealistic academic expectation is thinking that you can pass advanced calculus when you have not met the pre-requisites, don’t do your homework, and don’t ask for help when you need it.

- **Appropriate:** Some expectations are appropriate, such as the expectation that you take responsibility for your life and actions. Also, the expectation that you should not hurt other people. For college students, developing education and career goals that reflect their personality, interests, values, goals, abilities, and labor market demands are appropriate expectations.

- **Inappropriate:** It is possible for you to have inappropriate expectations of yourself, others and the world. It is also possible for others to have inappropriate expectations of you. Examples of inappropriate expectations would be to try to control other people’s behavior, by expecting someone to live their life according to your own preferences. Inappropriate academic expectations can include expecting someone to do something for you that you should do for yourself, such as your homework. Another example of inappropriate expectations is to expect your instructors to care more about how to entertain you rather than to teach you.

What screws us up most in life is the picture in our head of how it is supposed to be.

- **Concrete:** Concrete expectations are those that are based on reality and actual circumstances. Examples include voting for a particular politician because you expect him/her to create laws that address school mass shootings. Concrete academic expectations can include deciding to develop a specific study plan for your class so you can get an “A”.

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- **Abstract:** Abstract expectations are based on generalizations or theories rather than specific situations. Examples include expecting the world will be a better place in the future. Abstract academic expectations might include things such as assuming that going to college will lead to a better way of life.

### *Challenge of Differing Expectations:*

Expectations can be a powerful driving force that moves you forward, or a major barrier to your success. One thing that can make expectations even more challenging is when two people (or groups of people) have differing, or even conflicting expectations about what is going on. Differing expectations can occur in all aspects of life, such as family, friends, work, school, politics, religion, culture(s), etc. Differing expectations not cleared up often lead to conflict. A few common challenges some students may face: 1) When young college students and their parents disagree on what college degree or career the student should pursue. 2) When students want to spend 10 minutes sharing with their instructor everything they have going on in their lives that distracts them from getting their homework done; but the instructor wants the student to get to the point and focus on what the student needs from the instructor.



### *Identify Expectations Affecting Your Life*

Take a few minutes to identify some expectations that are affecting your life right now. What is their source (i.e., internal or external)?

What are some positive expectations that are helping you right now? What are their sources?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are some negative expectations that are impacting you right now? What are their sources?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflect:** Take a moment to notice your response to thinking about these expectations.

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### **Appropriate Expectations for College/Academic Success**

There are a few expectations that college students should have of themselves so they can succeed in college and their classes. Here are just a couple.

- **Clear Internal Purpose:** The number one predictor of college success is when you have internal motivation. In other words, you want to be in college because it serves your purpose.

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That purpose is usually translated into an education or academic goal. So, do you know what degree, certificate, or skill you are pursuing and why? Do you know what career you are trying to prepare for? Sometimes students don’t know that when they start, or may change their minds once or twice during their journey. However, if you are having difficulty making this decision, or sticking with one decision, then you should seek the help of a career counselor.

- **Clearly Defined Priorities:** Life will not stop happening just because you decide to go to college. One critical skill for college success is to know where your priorities are so that you don’t get distracted by ‘life.’ Do you have clearly defined priorities?
- **Willingness to Commit to Homework Time:** College and learning is based on the premise that you will spend time outside of the classroom on reinforcing what you are learning inside the classroom. The standard expectation is that for every hour you spend inside the classroom (or units you take), you will be spending two hours on homework. This homework time can include: preparing for class, reading, memorizing, reviewing, working on group projects, going to activities, researching and writing papers, preparing presentations, etc. If you do not make time for these activities, you will have difficulty finishing your classes.



- **College Will Develop Skills:** There are a few types of skills that will help you get what you want out of life, and college is a place to develop and/or strengthen them:

- **Technical Skills:** These skills that are specific to a profession that you need to be able to do in the job. Examples include: A nurse taking blood pressure, an accountant creating a balance sheet, a pilot reading an instrument panel, etc.
- **Transferable Skills:** These are skills that you can take into many professions and include things like critical thinking, effective communication, strategic thinking, project management, technology, etc.
- **Job Search Skills:** These skills are necessary when you compete for highly-desired jobs. They include things, like developing a professional resume and online presence, networking, and interviewing, etc.
- **Life Skills:** These are the types of skills that will help you function effectively in everyday life and career: Planning, sacrifice, discipline, persistence, resilience, adaptability, prioritizing, time management, coping skills, boundaries, etc.
- **Soft Skills:** These skills allow you to work well with others on the job and help avoid conflicts: Interpersonal skills, conflict management, team participation, diplomacy, etc.



## Developing and Strengthening Appropriate Expectations

If you have gotten this far and come to realize that you should work on strengthening your appropriate expectations; then there are some things you can do to develop positive expectations in your life.

- **Develop Internal Locus of Control:** Your ‘locus’ of control is your perceived center of control. A person who has an Internal Locus of Control is someone who believes that they can

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control what happens in their lives. An individual who has an External Locus of Control sees themselves as a victim of forces outside of themselves. Do you believe that you can control what happens in your life?

- **Serenity Prayer:** There is a well-known coping strategy known as the “Serenity Prayer” that was developed by the 12-Steps movement for individuals trying to overcome addictions. It has three elements:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

The courage to change the things I can.

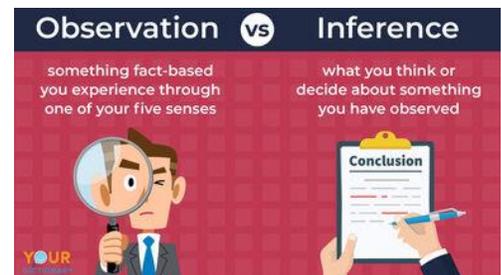
The wisdom to know the difference.

Often what leads people to have inappropriate expectations is not knowing the difference between what they can control and what they cannot control. Basically, you can control yourself and your actions. You can control how you respond to other people and to the world around you, but you cannot really control the world around you. Sometimes the most challenging things you can face in life is to accept that you cannot control or change another person because that person (just like you) has free will. Thus they have the choice to do or not do something – no matter how much you may want it for them.

- **Increase Your Self Awareness:** The more aware you are of what drives you – your needs, thoughts, feelings, wants, personality, interests, values, priorities, goals, life experience, etc. – the more likely you will be aware of your expectations and their sources. Once you understand your expectations, their sources, and whether or not they are realistic and/or appropriate, the sooner you can do something with them.

- **Observation and Inference:** Develop a skill that is usually taught to students beginning studying the sciences: Learning to distinguish the difference between “observation” and “inference”.

**Observation** is the information you gather about a situation based **exclusively** on what you can observe with your five senses: What you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. **Inference** is when you make **assumptions or conclusions** based on the information you gather from your five senses. The problem is that inferences are not always accurate. Sometimes expectations are a result of inferences that may not be tied to reality.



- **Develop Good Coping Skills:** Life, school and career always bring with them challenges that people face every day. Instead of expecting to have a perfect life with no problems, it is more realistic to learn to develop good coping skills for managing life’s and school’s challenges. That way those problems and challenges don’t derail you from getting what you want.
- **Develop Effective Goal Setting Skills:** Effective goal setting allows you to achieve what you expect to get out of life. Setting effective goals involves using the S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) method. When your goals are SMART, you are much more likely to accomplish them.

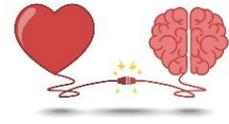
## Dealing with Inappropriate Expectations:

So, what can you do if you realize that you have inappropriate expectations, or that someone else

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has inappropriate expectations of you? The good news is that there are a lot of life skills that you can develop to help you manage such inappropriate expectations.

- **Emotional Intelligence:** Develop your emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence has four components: 1) Aware of your own emotions and their sources. 2) Able to control your emotions. 3) Aware of other’s emotions. 4) Respond to other’s emotions in an appropriate fashion. Whereas people who lack emotional intelligence often get upset easily, have difficulty controlling their emotions when they are inappropriate, and often blame others instead of taking responsibility for their emotions and reactions to life. So, accepting responsibility for your emotions empowers you to recognize your expectations, their sources, and lays a foundation for managing those expectations.



- **Boundaries:** Having healthy boundaries means that you understand and accept what you have control over; and you know when and how to say ‘no’ to inappropriate expectations, requests, and behaviors.

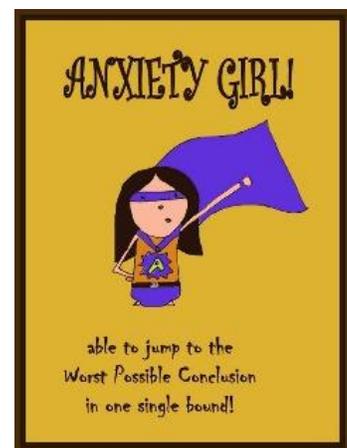


- **Tailor Your Communication:** Especially when dealing with individuals who have differing or conflicting expectations from your own, tailoring what and how you communicate with them will help minimize conflict and increase the likelihood that you can find common ground upon which you can build compatible expectations.

- **Develop a Growth Mindset:** People with a growth mindset believe their talents, abilities and intelligences can be developed in different ways. Whereas individuals with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence is fixed and can’t grow. Thus, if you have a growth mindset, you can choose to develop new ways of doing things – even if it is challenging to do so. Thus, you can learn to overcome inappropriate expectations.

- **Accept Change as a Fact of Life:** Sometimes inappropriate expectations result from people not wanting things to change. The easier you can accept unwanted changes in your life, the easier your transition process will be, and the quicker you will be able to develop more realistic and appropriate expectations.

- **Get Professional Help:** There are a lot of highly-skilled professionals on and off campus who can help you with various types of challenges associated with inappropriate expectations. Below is a list of on-campus resources that can help you effectively manage expectations in your life. For non-students, similarly-skilled professionals are often available off campus as well.



## Resources to Help Students Manage Expectations:

If you want support and resources to help you develop positive and realistic expectations, there are several resources on campus:

- **Tutoring:** Mt. SAC offers tutoring in most subjects taught on campus, and there are several tutoring centers on campus. So, if you struggle in any of your classes, or just want one-on-one assistance as you work through your studies, then make an appointment to see a tutor.

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<https://www.mtsac.edu/students/academic-resources.html>

- **Mental Health Counseling:** If you need help in dealing with, or having, appropriate expectations, the Student Health Center offers mental health counseling services to students. <https://www.mtsac.edu/healthcenter/index.html>
- **Career Counseling:** If you need assistance in identifying an appropriate career goal, then the campus career center and career counseling can help. [https://www.mtsac.edu/counseling/career\\_major\\_exploration.html](https://www.mtsac.edu/counseling/career_major_exploration.html)
- **Academic Counseling:** If you need help identifying realistic and appropriate educational goals, selecting classes appropriate for your career goals, or help in choosing classes, then the academic counselors can help: <https://www.mtsac.edu/counseling/>
- **Financial Counseling:** If you need help developing realistic expectations about your current and future financial situations, or how to manage money, then Mt. SAC’s Mountie Money Management Center can help: <https://www.mtsac.edu/mmmc/>
- **Additional Achievement Workshops:** The ASAC offers over 30 workshops related to issues on student success, study skills, and technology topics. The following workshop topics address issues directly related to ideas discussed in this workshop: <https://www.mtsac.edu/asac/achievement-workshops/>
  - Academic Mindset (*growth mindset*)
  - Asking for Help in Academics
  - Boundaries for Academic Success
  - Clarify Priorities for Academics
  - Coping Strategies for Academics
  - Know Your Audience (*tailor your communication*)
  - Locus of Control
  - Time Management
  - Study Skills Topics Offered:
    - Remember What You Read
    - Critical Thinking in Academics
    - Note Taking Essentials
    - Pass Quizzes & Tests
    - Final Exams First Aid

## Summary

When you become aware of the internal and external, positive and negative expectations that affect your life and success, you can begin to harness them and channel their power towards success. Mt. SAC offers many resources to help students channel expectations so you can achieve your education and career goals.

## Reflection

What did you learn from this workshop?

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How can you use this information this week?

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